

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

A stylized, abstract portrait of Jesus Christ. The figure has a brown face, dark eyes, and a beard. He is wearing a blue robe with a white cross-like symbol on the chest. His right hand is raised to his chest. Behind his head is a black halo with a yellow center. The background is composed of large, colorful geometric shapes (triangles and polygons) in shades of blue, green, yellow, red, and purple. The overall style is graphic and modern.

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THE LIVING WORD

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EDITORIAL

A day begins with the 'rising of the Sun'. Its light and energy enkindle all living beings and give *joy* and *hope* to them. But each living creature responds differently to the Sun. The vegetative world responds to the Sun according to the law of nature. Instincts play an important role in the case of animals.

What about a human being? His rationality cannot be kept in abeyance albeit his reasoning may challenge his traditional beliefs. The religious person is not an exception even if his reasoning may disturb his own religious beliefs. The theological survey in contemporary Christology (Thomas Anatharackal, *The Myriad Christ: A Theological Survey in Contemporary Christology*) indicates how theologians of the day reflect Christ and Christianity differently. It is also worth mentioning how St. Augustine, despite his philosophical reasoning, could cross across the *city of the world to city of God* (Owoeye S.A., *Augustine of Hippo: From a Miserable Recluse to Stardom*). In fact, when he found the *divine truth* (*Redemptor Hominis*, 19) he could not remain in the city of the world although it offered sensual pleasures.

Now we are in a new epoch. The much awaited new millennium is dawned. People are awakening to respond to the challenges of time. How does a Christian respond? What should be his attitude to the new millennium? Being a rational being can one keep his rationality in dormancy? But if rationality leads to "philosophical pride" (*Fides et Ratio*, 4) is it possible to achieve the *divine truth*? No! Hence one has to find time to contemplate the *face of Christ* (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15). Such a contemplation gives one a *new energy* (*NMI*, 15) to live the *spirituality of communion* (*NMI*, 43-45). With this *new energy* a Christian can not only find out the *divine truth* but also respond to the challenges of time whether *ecological* or *ethical* (*NMI*, 51-52). When one is charged with *new energy* no one will get time to look back and get *perturbed* (Sadhu Ittiyavirah, *In Every Rise and Fall*) or for *setting into laziness* (*NMI*, 15).

Editor

of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men The Church therefore has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture (NA 2).

Today, as Christians, we cannot ignore the fact that we live in a pluralistic world, a religiously pluralistic world. We cannot overlook the reality of other religions around us and their significance in the world.³ Many theologians suggest that Christian theology today "cannot continue to be made in isolation from an interior dialogue with other religious traditions, that in fact the future of Christian theology lies in the deepest possible assimilation of the spirit and finding of other religions."⁴ In fact, other religious traditions become part of the existential situation of any theologian today. As Smith observes, "from now on any serious intellectual statement of the Christian faith must include, if it is to serve its purpose among men, some doctrine of other religions."⁵ He argues: "A Christian theology of other religions' positions could hardly be adequate that did not take those other positions seriously."⁶ According to Hwang, "a true theology is a comparative

³ According to the survey in 1991, after Christians (around one billion), Muslims are the largest religious community (around 962 million), followed by Hindus (721 million), Buddhists (327 million), Sikhs (19 million), and Jews (18 million). Other new religions which are difficult to classify come to around 119 million and tribal religions roughly 99 million. See G. Anderson et al., (eds.), *Mission in the Nineteenth Nineties*, (Grand Rapids/Mich: Eerdmans, 1991) 72-73.

⁴ Lucien Richard, "Some Recent Developments on the Question of Christology and World Religions," in Richard W. Rousseau, (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the Next Frontier*, vol.1, (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1981) 111. See also James M. Carmody, "Towards a Comparative Christology," *Horizons* 1 (1974) 15-33; John Carmody, "A Next Step for Catholic Theology," *Theology Today* 32 (1976) 371-381; Klaus K. Klostermaier, "A Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Truth," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12 (1975) 157-171 and Richard H. Drummond, "Christian Theology and the History of Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12 (1975) 389-405.

⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972) 133.

⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981) 108.

theology, a true religiology a comparative religiology, and a true philosophy of religion a comparative philosophy of religion.”⁷

Theologians argue that the task of theology today is to open one's religious traditions to others both theologically and experimentally. This, in fact, raises many questions: If God's love and grace is available for all, what is the relevance of a unique Christian existence, or what is the necessity of a Christian church? Moreover, if salvation is attainable in all religions, how can Christians claim that Jesus is the unique saviour of all humanity? What is the need of evangelization? Is Jesus the only mediator between God and human beings (Acts 4:12)? Or, is he one among many saviours? What would be the meaning and the salvific value of the Christ-event in relationship to the other religious ways of salvation? Can Christians still believe in a God who desires the salvation of all humankind (Acts 14:17; I Tim. 2:4; Rom. 2:6-7)? These are, in fact, challenging and complex questions and the answers to them are not that simple. Thus, a theoretical commitment to Jesus Christ could be in tension with our lived experience and practical attitude towards non-Christians and even non-believers. Therefore, this article attempts to delineate the different stands of theologians on the question of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in our religiously pluralistic context. In this discussion, we make use of the following divisions for the sake of a better understanding, namely: Jesus Christ as the Exclusive Mediator, Constitutive Mediator, one Mediator among many Mediators, Model of Liberation, and Normative Mediator.⁸ Admittedly, this overview will be selective, i.e., developed on the basis of the most prominent theologians who belong to each of these categories.

⁷ Philip H. Hwang, "Interreligious Dialogue: Its Reasons, Attitudes & Necessary Assumptions," *Dialogue & Alliance* 3 (1989) 15.

⁸ With adaptations, these titles are taken from J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976) 545-566; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1956); Angelo Amato, "Christology in Perspective," in R. Latourelle & R. Fisichella, (eds.), in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 139-140; Angelo Amato, "Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, and the Encounter with Religions: Commentary on the Bibliography," *Pontificium consilium pro Dialogo Inter Religiones Bulletin* 27 (1992) 217-262; Scott Cowdell, *Is Jesus Unique?: A Study of Recent Christology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); Paul Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at the Crossroads," *Concilium* 183 (1986) 99-107; Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, (London: SCM Press, 1983); and Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 1985).

In D'Costa's view, the exclusivist position, which is mostly found in Lutheran and Calvinist circles, is basically concerned to affirm two central insights: "The first is that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring salvation into the world and that this salvation is both judgement and mercy to all human beings who are deeply estranged from God." And second, "this salvation won by Christ is only available through explicit faith in Christ which comes from hearing the Gospel preached (*fides ex auditu*) and requires repentance, baptism and the embracing of a new life in Christ."¹²

Religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man From the standpoint of

¹³ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol.1/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956); Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958); Hendrik Kraemer, *Why Christianity of All Religions?*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).

revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man.¹⁴

As Dupuis observes, according to Barth, "the one valid knowledge of God is the Christian knowledge received by human beings in Jesus Christ. The god of others is an idol."¹⁵ Barth states: "According to the Holy Scripture God's revelation takes place in the fact that God's Word became a man and that this man has become God's Word. The Incarnation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is God's revelation."¹⁶ Therefore, for Barth, revelation has become a reality in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Knitter observes that for Barth the reason why there can be only one true religion is that, first of all, revelation and salvation are offered only in Jesus Christ and secondly, this one religion is justified in such a way that nothing is really affirmed or answered in the world of religions.¹⁷ Thus, for Knitter, Barth's model is rooted in a christology that holds Jesus Christ to be the only saviour (*solo Christo*) and in a soteriology that sees salvation occurring only through faith (*sola fide*) in him.¹⁸

According to Kraemer, since the Word who became flesh is the same Word as the eternal Logos through whom all things are made, it is impossible for Christians to interpret God's revelation in nature, history and conscience as independent fields. God's revelation can only be legitimately expressed in the light of the revelation in Jesus Christ. Kraemer wants to set all religions, including Christianity, in the light of the person of Jesus Christ who is the revelation of God and who alone has the authority to judge every religion. He argues: "If we are ever to know what true and divinely willed religion is, we can do this only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ and through nothing else."¹⁹ That is to say that, observes D'Costa, for Kraemer, whenever a person does not submit to Christ and surrender himself or herself to God revealed in Jesus Christ, however

¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 299-300, 302.

¹⁵ Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1994) 158.

¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.

¹⁷ Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1985) 85.

¹⁸ Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 87.

sincere and loyal their religion, the fundamental disobedience of humankind is reaffirmed.²⁰ Alan Race observes:

The exclusivist theology of religions has come to represent the most clear-cut of all the theories in this field. It involves no complicated theory about the nature of religious experience; it appeals to what for many is a self-evident biblical witness; it gives a central function to the person of Christ; the internal logic of the argument appears consistent and coherent; and, finally, it is the position which corresponds most closely to what has generally been held to be orthodox Christianity through the centuries.²¹

However, some exclusivists hold that not all non-Christians are condemned, though the heart of the Christian message requires that *sola fide* be maintained. Knitter observes that the mainline Protestant systematic theologians such as Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Carl Heinz Ratschow and Carl Braaten "argue that Christians not only can but [do] recognize that the God revealed in Jesus is truly speaking through voices other than that of Jesus."²² They all affirm a universal or general revelation other than in Jesus Christ, but are reluctant to agree to a salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Thus, in response to the question of salvation of non-Christians, many exclusivists will argue for the urgency and necessity of world-wide evangelization, rather than spending time and energy on improper speculation about the possibility of salvation happening in the non-Christian religions.²³

²⁰ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, 58.

²¹ Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 24.

²² Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 98. See also Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Christian Dialogue with other Religions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology*, (London: SPCK, 1978); Norman Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion*, (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971). Recently, Douglas Geivett, Gray Phillips and Alister McGrath expressed views similar to those of Neill, Newbigin and Anderson. See Douglas Geivett & Gray Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach," in Dennis Okholm & T. Phillips, (eds.), *More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, (Grand Rapids/Michigan: Zondervan, 1995) 211-245; Alister McGrath, "A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach," in Okholm & Phillips, (eds.), *More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 149-180.

2 Jesus Christ as Constitutive Mediator

This is less rigorist than the first position and allows for anonymous or implicit faith in Christ as a way of salvation. This position can be called an inclusive christocentric position and is more optimistic about the possibility of salvation of non-Christians. For the proponents of this stand, all are saved by the grace of Christ, but that grace is available to all, even to those who have never heard of Jesus Christ.²⁴ The inclusivistic position "aims to hold together two equally binding convictions: the operation of the grace of God in all the great religions of the world working for salvation, and the uniqueness of the manifestation of the grace of God in Christ, which makes a universal claim as the final way of salvation."²⁵ That means its main concern is to balance the two main axioms: *sola Christus* and the universal salvific will of God. Thus, this position holds that there is only one economy of salvation and Jesus Christ is the normative revelation of God and is constitutive of God's work in the world. He is *the* mediator of all revelations, and the salvation attained in the world is only through him. The term 'constitutive' here means that without this historical incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, no person would be saved. The key biblical text to defend this position is: "God our Saviour, desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1Tim. 2:4-6).²⁶

However, inclusivist theologians argue that the grace of Christ is available within the non-Christian religions and therefore the non-Christian religions have a certain salvific status. In Catholic inclusivism, as Merrigan observes:

Christ is always implicated in the salvific process, either as the *font* of saving grace (including that grace which is operative in the non-Christian religions) [Karl Rahner], or as the *goal* of all of humanity's religious striving (in which case he is the norm against which all religions systems are to be measured) [Hans Küng], or

²⁴ This idea of inclusivism can be found even in the early church writings. See Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 46, 1-4, in H. Dressler, et al., (eds.), *The Fathers of the Church: Writings of Saint Justin the Martyr*, vol. 6, (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1977) 83-84.

²⁵ Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 38.

²⁶ Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views", 532-553.

as the *catalyst* for the operation of 'the Spirit of truth' who fills all of creation and draws all women and men to the Father (via diverse religious traditions) [Gavin D'Costa].²⁷

Undoubtedly, Rahner is one of the major architects of the inclusivist position in view of his famous concept of 'anonymous Christians' and 'anonymous Christianity'.²⁸ While fully accepting the pluralist appeal that an all-loving God could not have delivered the majority of humankind to perdition, Rahner maintains, with the exclusivists, that salvation comes only through faith in God through Jesus Christ. For him, "God desires the salvation of everyone. And this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ."²⁹ Rahner writes:

If, on the one hand, we conceive salvation as something specially *Christian*, if there is no salvation apart from Christ ... and if, on the other hand, God has really, truly and seriously intended this salvation for all men - then these two aspects cannot be reconciled in any other way than by stating that every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace.³⁰

At the same time, Rahner contends:

We must bear in mind here that his [Jesus'] word as God's final word can be understood to be definitive not because God now ceases arbitrarily to say anything further, although he could have said more, and not because he 'concludes' revelation, although he could have continued it had he just wanted to. It is the final word of God that is present in Jesus because there is nothing to say beyond it, because God has really and in a strict sense offered *himself* in Jesus.³¹

For Rahner, Jesus as God made man, is the true and only efficient cause

²⁷ Terrence Merrigan, "Religious Knowledge in the Pluralist Theology of Religions," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 686-687.

²⁸ Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 115-134. For different theories of 'anonymous Christianity,' see Anita Roper, *Die anonymen Christen*, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1963). However, Rahner's concept of 'anonymous Christian' is criticized by pluralists, exclusivists and even inclusivists. See John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1973) 127; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post Liberal Age*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984) 30-45.

²⁹ Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," 122.

³⁰ Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," 123.

of our salvation and, as Son of God, he is our salvation itself and our means of access by grace to God the Father. Rahner believes that it is only in Jesus Christ that this salvation is offered, and through the one church and through Christianity that it must ultimately be mediated to all humanity.³²

However, quite a number of theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, share the idea of Rahner though with some variations.³³ Some others who are also within inclusivism argue that while the grace of Christ is available to non-Christians, one cannot confidently attribute the mediation of this grace to the non-Christian religions.³⁴ However, the inclusivists are generally united in affirming that Christ's salvific grace is available to the invincibly ignorant and therefore they question the rigorous application of the axiom: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.³⁵ In short, as D'Costa contends:

The form of inclusivism ... tries to do full justice to [the] two most important Christian axioms: that salvation comes through God in Christ alone, and that God's salvific will is truly universal. By maintaining these two axioms in fruitful tension, the inclusivist paradigm can be characterized by an openness and commitment; an openness that seeks to explore the many and various ways in which God has spoken to all his children in the non-Christian religions and an openness that will lead to the positive fruits of the exploration transforming and fulfilling Christianity, so much so that its future shape may be very different from the Church we know today.³⁶

³² Karl Rahner, "The Church, Churches, and Religions," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10, (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1973) 31.

³³ For example, Edward Schillebeeckx, Avery Dulles and Richard McBrien, although they may not use Rahner's notion of 'anonymous Christians' explicitly, somehow share the same idea of inclusivism. See Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind," *Concilium* 1 (1965) 34-50; Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1983) and Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981) 245-273. For Protestant theologians who hold the idea of inclusivism, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, (London: SCM Press, 1970); Carl Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity Among the World's Religions*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

³⁴ See Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council*, (Leiden/New York/Köln: E. J. Brill, 1992).

³⁵ D'Costa, "Christian Theology and Other Faiths," 299.

³⁶ D'Costa, "Theology of Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Inclusivism," 20.

3 Jesus Christ as One Among Many Mediators

This is a theocentric non-normative position, according to which there are many mediators of salvation and Jesus Christ is one among them. The proponents of this position deny the claim that Jesus is normative or constitutive for salvation. For them, all mediators of other world religions are equal to Jesus Christ, and in this sense, all religions are equal. Jesus is the saviour for Christians as other saviour-figures are for other religions.³⁷ In other words, according to D'Costa, this model "maintains that non-Christian religions can be equally salvific paths to the one God, and that Christianity's claim to be the only way (exclusivism), or the fulfilment of all other religions (inclusivism), should be rejected for good *theological, phenomenological, and philosophical* reasons."³⁸ However, Race puts this model in this way:

It is the belief that there is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God's revealing and redeeming activity has elicited response in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focused perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality.³⁹

For Race, tolerance of other religious traditions is the major hallmark of this position. He argues that the knowledge of God is partial in all religions, including Christianity. In order to have the full truth about God, all religions must acknowledge their need for one another.⁴⁰ For him, "Christianity ... represents only one cultured response of the divine initiative; it cannot claim a monopoly of religious truth."⁴¹ In other words, "Jesus is decisive, not because he is the focus for all the light everywhere revealed in the world, but for the vision he has brought

³⁷ Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," 559-562.

³⁸ Gavin D'Costa, "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986) 211. For a summary of the pluralists' theological, phenomenological and philosophical arguments of this position and the problems involved in it, see D'Costa, "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," 211-224.

³⁹ Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 77-78.

⁴⁰ Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 72.

in one cultural setting."⁴² Cowdell observes that, for pluralists, "Christianity is just one way among many, Jesus one teacher among many, Christ one symbol among many. Many are good, none are best. Without absolutes there can be no talk of uniqueness or finality."⁴³

However, there are remarkable differences among the pluralist theologians themselves. Some argue that all religions have a common essence that can be historically identified within the mystical traditions of the world religions.⁴⁴ Another group gives importance to historical relativity and they argue that all traditions are relative and therefore cannot claim any superiority over other equally relative or limited ways of salvation.⁴⁵ For Arnold Toynbee, the study of the history of religions reveals that there is no movement of religions towards Christianity or Jesus Christ as unique or even normative. He states:

We ought ... to try to purge our Christianity of the traditional Christian belief that Christianity is unique. This is not just a Western Christian belief; it is intrinsic to Christianity itself. All the same, I suggest that we have to do this if we are to purge Christianity of the exclusive-mindedness and intolerance that follows from a belief in Christianity's uniqueness.⁴⁶

Yet another group argues that all religions have substantial historical differences and the real unity is found not in their doctrine or mystical experiences but in the common experience of salvation, or in other words, the common experience of liberation. Amato observes:

This model's outlook is not ecclesiocentric, Christocentric or trinitarian, but generically 'theocentric' in the sense of a reference to a sacred absolute. Salvation comes from 'God', not only from the God revealed by Christianity but by an ineffable God, the 'holy mystery' present in different ways in every religion. Jesus Christ

⁴² Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 153.

⁴³ Cowdell, *Is Jesus Unique?: A Study on Recent Christology*, 269.

⁴⁴ See Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, (New York: Macmillan, 1962); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (London: Collins, 1977).

⁴⁵ See for example, Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) and Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, (London: SCM Press, 1972).

⁴⁶ Arnold Toynbee, "What Should Be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?" in Owen C. Thomas (ed.), *Attitudes Toward Other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations*, (London: SCM, 1969) 160-161.

disappears from the picture as the exclusive, constituent, or normative saviour. He is simply a relative mediator of salvation.⁴⁷

John Hick is very consistent in his approach to pluralism.⁴⁸ Hick advocates a *Copernican revolution* in christology, that is, a revolution that must specially consist of a shift in paradigm, a movement from the traditional christocentric understanding to a new theocentric outlook. In Hick's opinion, the universe of faiths centres upon God, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion. God is the sun, the original source of light and life, whom all the religions reflect in their own different ways.⁴⁹ Hick advocates a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre and that all the religions serve and revolve around it.⁵⁰ In other words, Hick demands "a shift from an ecclesio-centric to a theocentric understanding of the religions."⁵¹ It is, in fact, a shift from an ecclesiocentric and christocentric to a theocentric understanding of the religions based on the affirmation of the *universal salvific will of God*. He notes: "We say as Christians that God is the God of universal love, that he is the Creator and Father of all mankind, that he wills the ultimate good and salvation of all men."⁵² He then asks whether such a God could have "ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation?"⁵³ And his answer is definitely 'No'. It is precisely this doctrine of God's universal love for all people that leads him to an understanding of a Copernican revolution in Christian theology. This theological axiom of the universal salvific will of God is a fundamental thought of most of the pluralist theologians.⁵⁴ As D'Costa observes, according to Hick, "this Copernican attitude is consistent with the principle that if one's own religious experience is granted veracity, then this principle must be equally extended to the religious experience of others, be they Hindu, Buddhist

⁴⁷ See Amato, "Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, and the Encounter with Religions: Commentary on the Bibliography," 222.

⁴⁸ See John Hick, *The Centre of Christianity*, (London: SCM Press, 1977); John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980); John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, (London: Macmillan, 1985); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, (London: Macmillan, 1989) and Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* which we have already quoted.

⁴⁹ Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 52.

⁵⁰ Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 131.

⁵¹ Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 131;

⁵² Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 122.

⁵³ Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 122.

⁵⁴ See Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 140; Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 15-16; Great Christian Theology of Religions, 70-105; Toyne, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, 111; Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 171 and Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 138.

or Muslim. To do otherwise would betray an unacceptable parochialism."⁵⁵

Hick, however, has gone on to develop a Kantian-type distinction, a distinction between the *divine noumenal reality* and the *phenomenal* world of religions and religious experience. The *divine noumenal reality*, similar to Kant's *noumenon*, exists independently and outside of human perception. Hick calls it *the Real*. The concrete world of religious experience is the expression of that reality as it appears to our human consciousness within different religious traditions.⁵⁶ For Hick, therefore, as observes D'Costa, all these independent religious traditions can be viewed as authentic but different responses to the noumenal divine reality.⁵⁷ He observes that "Hick discerned a common soteriological pattern within the major religious traditions, leading adherents to the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness."⁵⁸

Hick also argues that the images through which the incarnation of Jesus is presented have no literal meaning; they are in fact mythological. Hick states:

The idea of divine incarnation is a mythological idea. And I am using the term 'myth' in the following sense: a myth is a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers. Thus the truth of a myth is a kind of practical truth consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude to its object. That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning, but it is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king.⁵⁹

Hick argues that it was a natural tendency to exalt a human founder of a religion to an elevated status, as for example, in the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine

⁵⁵ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, 28.

⁵⁶ Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 105.

⁵⁷ D'Costa, "The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," 217.

⁵⁸ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, 28. See also John Hick, "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies* 17 (1981) 452.

⁵⁹ John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in John Hick, (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, (London: SCM Press, 1977) 178. However, Hick has been severely criticized for abandoning the central Christian truth of the incarnation and overthrowing the uniqueness of Christianity.

See J. Lipner, "Christians and the Uniqueness of Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975) 359-368.

of the Three Bodies (*Trikaya*).⁶⁰ The inclination to transform these psychological compelling experiences into a binding universal normative truth claim can be exemplified in the language of a husband who may say to his wife that "you are the most beautiful woman in the world ... you are the only woman for me."⁶¹ For Hick, the language of any religious commitment also should be understood in this way. In other words, the claim that Jesus is God incarnate is only a Christian religious claim and it should *not* be interpreted as a normative binding universal one.

Hick delineates God's nature as an operation, that of agape, which is revealed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus' agape is not simply the representation of God's agape, but it is the eternal divine agape made flesh or inhistorized. However, Jesus' agape is not identical with the whole of the infinite Agape-ing.⁶² In other words, Hick contends:

We want to say of Jesus that he was *totus deus*, 'wholly God', in the sense that his *agapé* was genuinely the *Agapé* of God at work on earth, but not that he was *totum dei*, 'the whole of God', in the sense that the divine *Agapé* was expressed without remainder in each or even in sum of his actions.⁶³

Therefore, in this view, Jesus is different from us in *degree* and not in *kind*.⁶⁴ As Richard observes, "the continuity between the divine Agape-ing and the agape-ing of Jesus is one of event rather than of entity, of activity rather than of substance. Christ is the Christian's image of God and the Incarnation is an effective mythic expression of the Christian's appropriate attitude to God."⁶⁵

Along with Hick, Gordon Kaufman and Langdon Gilkey also argue that the modern awareness of the historico-cultural limitations of all knowledge and religious beliefs, and of the impossibility of judging the truth claims of another culture and tradition, have rendered the claim of uniqueness of any particular

⁶⁰ Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in Hick, (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 168-170. For him, the same thing can also be said of Mithras, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali and so on. See Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 172, 178.

⁶¹ Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 185.

⁶² Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 152-154.

⁶³ Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 159.

⁶⁴ See Donald M. Baile, *God Was in Christ: A Essay on Incarnation and Atonement*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1956) and Lampe Geoffrey, *God as Spirit*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

religious tradition no longer credible and valuable.⁶⁶ Thus, as Peter C. Phan observes, for pluralist theologians, any claim for the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus is invalidated by three arguments: namely, "historical consciousness, the nature of God as Absolute mystery, and the ethical duty of promoting justice and peace."⁶⁷

4 Jesus Christ as Model of Liberation

This can be considered as an extreme pluralistic model, inspired by certain tendencies in liberation theology.⁶⁸ Amato also speaks about such a position which goes beyond the pluralistic model to a 'liberation model', namely, 'religions without Christ' model. This model, in a way, presents Jesus as non-mediator. According to this position, theologians of liberation and theologians of religions must work together since they share a common objective. The focus of interreligious dialogue, according to the proponents of this view, is not God or Christ but the liberation of human beings through appropriate action. That is to say that it is a move from ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, theocentrism to a 'kingdom-centrism' or 'soteriocentrism'. Therefore, here the main concern is not how each religion relates to the church, to Christ or to God, but how and in what way it is committed to promoting human well-being and liberation of the poor. In other words, Christians do not need to know whether Jesus Christ is the unique and universal saviour to commit themselves to the promotion of salvation. What constitutes the ultimate criterion for religious evaluation is correct behaviour or conduct. In short, Christians should understand that their conduct is more

⁶⁶ See Gordon Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," in Hick & Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 3-15; Langdon Gilkey, "Plurality and Its Theological Implications," in Hick & Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 37-50.

⁶⁷ Phan, "The Claim of Uniqueness and Universality in Interreligious Dialogue," *Dialogue & Alliance* 7 (1993) 35.

⁶⁸ See Knitter, *No Other Name?* 169-231; Paul Knitter, "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions," in Hick & Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 178-200; Paul Knitter, "The Pluralist Move and Its Critics," *Drew Gateway* 58 (1988) 1-16; Paul Knitter, "A Liberation-Centered Dialogue Among Religions," *Drew Gateway* 58 (1988) 17-32; Paul Knitter, "A Liberation-Centered Theology of Religions," *Drew Gateway* 58 (1988) 33-48. See also Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1988). However, none of these authors have used explicitly the term 'Model of Liberation' for Jesus in this spectrum of models. The use of this term, 'Model of Liberation' is a finding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

important for their identity than a correct knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. In Knitter's words: "The foundation and main concern for any theological assessment of other religions is *not* their relatedness to the Church (ecclesiocentrism) or to Christ (christocentrism) or even to God (theocentrism), but how much they are promoting salvation - the welfare of humanity."⁶⁹ The biblical texts to support this position are "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21), and "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these shall be yours as well" (Mt. 6:33).

Knitter presents this model as an anthropocentric universe and soteriological intentionality determined by human well-being. Human well-being here is socio-economic and political well-being or liberation.⁷⁰ The supporters of this stand give importance to *orthopraxis* over *orthodoxy*. That is to say that one does not first know the truth and then apply it in praxis; rather it is in action, in doing, that the truth is really known and validated. For them, the claim of the uniqueness or the finality of Jesus Christ is neither possible nor necessary. Knitter argues that the uniqueness or universality of a particular religion or a religious figure can be verified only by examining how much these contribute to the liberation or well-being of the poor.⁷¹ For Aloysius Pieris, too, the claim of uniqueness is a claim of faith and therefore should be guarded not by rational arguments but by action in favour of the poor and the oppressed.⁷² Thus, these theologians advocate a 'right practice' for promoting the Kingdom and its liberation.⁷³ This eliminates the idea of *Jesus* as a mediator, and thereby he becomes *only a model of liberation*. Knitter states:

The insistence of liberation theology on the *primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy* assures Christians that if claims about the finality of Christ/Christianity are not possible, neither are they *necessary*. The primary concern of a theology of religions should not be the 'right belief' about the uniqueness of Christ, but the 'right practice,' with other religions, of furthering the Kingdom and its *soteria*.

⁶⁹ See Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads," 105.

⁷⁰ Amato, "Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, and the Encounter with Religions: Commentary on the Bibliography," 222-223.

⁷¹ Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," 178-200.

⁷² Aloysius Pieris, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation," 162-177.

⁷³ Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads," 104-106 and Knitter, "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions," 178-200.

Besides, Christians do not need orthodox clarity that Jesus is the 'only' or the 'final' or the 'universal' norm in order to experience and fully commit themselves to the liberating truth of his message.⁷⁴

However, this means, "not only that orthodoxy must be adjusted under the pressure of orthopraxis but that one can more comfortably bear with uncertainty about what is orthodox as long as one is able to make the responsible effort to bring about transformation and liberation in the world."⁷⁵ Knitter summarizes the relevance of the general theological method of the liberation theologians to christology as follows:

We cannot begin to know who this Jesus of Nazareth is unless we are following him, no matter what that demands. That is the starting point. Furthermore, everything we know or say about him must be reposed and reclarified in the praxis of following him through the changing contexts of history. That is a never-ending process."⁷⁶

5 Jesus Christ as Normative Mediator

Dissatisfied with the preceding four positions, namely, Jesus Christ as exclusive mediator, constitutive mediator, one among many mediators, and model of liberation, there are authors who seek to develop a fifth option.⁷⁷ The first

⁷⁴ Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads," 105-106.

⁷⁵ Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 194.

⁷⁶ Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 195. See also Leonard Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1981) 32-48; Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1978) 35.

⁷⁷ See J. A. DiNoia, "Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism," in B. D. Marshall, (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 249-274. Schubert Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992). D'Costa calls for a 'Trinitarian theology of Christianity' which helps to understand "why the presence of God's Spirit in other religions is the presence of Christ." See D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, 135. K. P. Aleaz seems to defend a pluralistic inclusivism which is "a perspective in inter-religious relations in which all the religious sources of the world are considered as the common property of the whole humanity."

(Jesus Christ as Exclusive Mediator) and the fourth (Jesus Christ as Model of Liberation) positions are totally unacceptable to these thinkers. They, in a way, attempt to propose a stand between the second (Jesus as Constitutive Mediator) and the third (Jesus as one among many mediators) models. In other words, this is a theocentric normative model which can be considered as a *via media* between the strict inclusivistic and pluralistic positions. Here the key word is 'normative,' instead of 'constitutive.' According to this position, Jesus Christ is the normative way to God and his salvation, but he is neither the exclusive nor the constitutive way to salvation. God's love is operative and manifest everywhere and this love is revealed most clearly in a unique way in the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, this can never mean that God's love is mediated *only* through Christ. Scriptural texts to support this theocentric normative position are 1 Jn. 4:7-10 and 1 Cor. 3:23 where we see that Christ belongs to God and God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). In Rom. 8:39, we read that the love of God is made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁷⁸ However, this position "has become ... a common perspective among Catholic theologians today; in different forms it is represented by H. Küng, H. R. Schlette, M. Hellwig, W. Bühlmann, A. Camps, P. Schoonenberg."⁷⁹

For Schubert Ogden, Jesus is not constitutive of our salvation, but he represents and reveals decisively and normatively the universal love of God. He says: "One is still free to affirm that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, as real and necessary as it certainly is, does not constitute our human rights and responsibilities, but rather vindicates them In the same way, one may affirm the necessity of Jesus' sacrificial life and death without in the least supposing that his sacrifice accomplished some other end than perfectly manifesting God's everlasting purpose to embrace even our sin within his love."⁸⁰ For Ogden, there is a normative dimension of Jesus' representation, because "in distinction from

⁷⁸ Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," 555-558.

⁷⁹ Paul Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads" 102. See also Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, (London: SCM Press, 1974); Walbert Bühlmann, *God's Chosen Peoples*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); Arnulf Camps, *Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and Other World Religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); Monika Hellwig, *Jesus the Compassion of God: New Perspectives on the Traditions of Christianity*, (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1983) 127-155; H. R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, (London: SCM, 1966); Piet Schoonenberg, "The Church and Non-Christian Religions," in Flanagan D., (ed.), *The Evolving Church*, (New York: Alba House Staten Island, 1966) 89-109.

⁸⁰ Schubert Ogden, "The Reformation That We Want," *Anglican Theological Review* 54 (1972) 267. See also Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 186.

all other historical events, the ultimate truth about our existence before God is normatively represented as revealed.⁸¹ Thus, Jesus as the Christ is normative for Christians because he represents our ultimate significance.⁸² He states: "The real meaning of the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ's Lordship is not that divine lordship is exercised solely in that particular life, but rather that wherever such lordship is exercised, and that naturally is everywhere, it can take no other form than the same promise and demand for us in Jesus."⁸³

Eugene TeSelle also argues for the centrality of Jesus Christ while speaks little of his uniqueness. For him: "The humanity of Jesus, although it is shaped by and attests to the Word, neither exhausts the Word nor is the sole means of access to it, for the Word is both knowable and efficacious elsewhere. The uniqueness of Jesus - a uniqueness which should not be seen apart from the uniqueness of Israel and the Church - will consist then in being the touchstone by which other responses are judged, the achievement by which their deficiencies are overcome, the center of gravity around which they cluster."⁸⁴ Niebuhr seems to hold the position that without explicitly denying that Jesus Christ is the constitutive mediator of all salvation, holds a sceptical attitude and says that we have no evidence to assert that Jesus Christ is the constitutive mediator for all humanity. He argues: "So far as I could see and can now see, that miracle has been wrought among us by and through Jesus Christ. I do not have the evidence which allow me to say that the miracle of faith in God is worked only by Jesus Christ and that it is never given to men outside the sphere of his working, though I may say that where I note its presence I posit the presence also of something like Jesus Christ."⁸⁵ One of the main proponents of this position today is Hans Küng, who argues that "Jesus Christ himself as he is testified to in the original evidence of the New Testament is the *norma normans*, the absolute standard Everything else can also provide a norm or standard and is one to varying degrees - but always only as a standard controlled by this Jesus Christ. In brief, the primary norm is Jesus Christ."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Ogden, *The Reality of God*, 184.

⁸² Ogden, *The Reality of God*, 69.

⁸³ Schubert Ogden, *Christ Without Myth: A Study Based on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, (London: Collins, 1962) 162-163.

⁸⁴ Eugene TeSelle, *Christ in Context*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) 164.

⁸⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *Christian Century* 77 (1960) 249.

⁸⁶ Herman Häring and Karl-Josef Kuschel, (eds.), *Hans Küng: His Work and His Way*, R. Nowell (trans.), (Glasgow: Collins, 1979) 455.

Conclusion

Our survey into the different positions of theologians on the question of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ shows that christology today is not a finished product of one of the major treatises of the systematic theology. The most visible and, at the same time, the most complex phenomenon in the history of christology seems to be the fact that there are as many christologies and Christ-images as there are interpretations and exegeses of the New Testament. However, the vigour and vitality of any christological research depends upon its ability to answer the ever-challenging question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk.8:29) in a relevant and intelligible manner for the people of each generation. In this religiously pluralistic world it is the duty of theologians to interpret Christ and his uniqueness intelligibly to the people of today. The very fact of the differences of opinion regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ reveals that he is still beyond all human explanations and interpretations and that no one has so far exhaustively explained who he was and who he *is*! This reality invites us to keep on our research in the question of Jesus' uniqueness and his relevance today.



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Augustine of Hippo: From a Miserable Recluse to Stardom

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Abstract

People are viewed from different perspectives. To an ignorant person or a cynic, St. Augustine, perhaps, was nothing but an enigma; while to those who are well acquainted with his contributions, he was probably a great thinker and theologian who rose from his early vulgar life to the acme of influence.

In this paper, an attempt is made to see how Augustine bestrode the world of christian tradition of the West like a colossus and how he rose from obscurity to prominence; from a sinner to a saint or from grass to grace. The useful practical lessons from Augustine's contributions for churches in Africa are also examined.

Introduction

Augustine, bishop of Hippo, Doctor of the Church, a philosopher and perhaps, the most influential theologian of the church was born in Tagaste, Numidia (modern Souk Ahas, in Algeria¹) on November 13, 354². Aurelius Augustine otherwise called Augustine was the last in the line of outstanding fathers of the church which North Africa produced.³ Born of a pagan father -

¹ Brown, P. : *Augustine of Hippo* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 19.

² Graw Hill, M. C.: *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. 1, 1967, p. 104.

³ Trenga, L.: *A History of Religion East and West* (London : The Macmillan Press Ltd. and Basingstoke, 1979), p. 182.

Patricius - and a Christian mother - Monica, Augustine enjoyed a deep religious influence of his devoted mother who constantly prayed and admonished him until his conversion. Monica, Augustine's mother was one of the most godly women in Christian history. Both parents, however, had one quality in common: determination. While Patricius⁴ showed 'pigheaded resolution' to get his son educated, Monica was relentless about her son's conversion to Christ. In his early life, Augustine lived a licentious life; he took a mistress to whom he remained faithful for fifteen years. He had a son through his mistress called Adeodatus (given by God).⁵ He went to Carthage to study law, and when he had completed his studies in law, he headed for Rome for employment in the company of his concubine. In 374, he adopted Manichaeism with which he later became disillusioned. He opened a school of rhetoric in Rome and later went to Milan where he came under the influence of St. Ambrose. He became a neoplatonist and was later converted to Christianity under a powerful sermon of St. Ambrose. He was ordained priest and later consecrated bishop of Hippo.

Contributions

1.1 Philosophical Contributions

Augustine, primarily, a theologian, was a voluminous writer who did not draw any line of demarcation between philosophy and theology. In his "Confession" and "The City of God" - his most famous works - he emphasised man's ultimate yearning. He contended that man yearned for happiness. Happiness, as he explained, constituted man's deepest natural yearning which human mind, except such yearning was met, relentlessly sought. He, however, believed that such yearning could not be met unless man knew God. Only God could satisfy this yearning. Omoregbe while writing on St. Augustine paraphrases this and reports :

... the happiness man seeks is perfect happiness and no transitory and imperfect happiness will justify this natural yearning. God alone can satisfy this natural desire, for God alone can be the

object of perfect happiness, nothing else can provide man with this perfect happiness that he seeks relentlessly.⁶

Happiness, to all intents and purposes, appears to be a relative term; different people define it differently and to many, too, the means of attaining it differs. Consequently, to a sick man, it perhaps means good health while the poor may be tempted to define it as prosperity. Hedonists believe that man is by nature a pleasure seeking animal and all human actions are propelled toward the search for pleasure. Jeremy Bentham strongly holds the view that man seeks pleasure directly or indirectly in all his endeavours as means of obtaining happiness. Jeremy bases his own version of utilitarianism on this.⁷ While Epicurus confuses pleasure with happiness. The utilitarians speak of both pleasure and happiness, interchangeably as if the two terms are synonymous. Socrates believes that happiness is the main goal of man but the only way to attain it is through living a virtuous life based on knowledge. Plato supports Socrates and postulates that happiness is the man's life goal but the road that leads to it is virtuous life. Augustine, perhaps, was responding to a common belief that happiness came from sensual pleasure, material well-being, honourable status or other worldly splendour, believed that happiness could only be gotten from God. Philosophers of the platonic school aver that there is an abstract, absolute good from which all other specific goods are derived and that this is the source of happiness.⁸ Coles strongly affirms that life in which happiness (the good) is identified with sensual pleasure is vulgar and such life reveals a slavish, bestial mentality, little better than that of a brute animal.⁹ Such a life, cannot, he contends, give an enduring happiness. Augustine stressed the fact that only by turning to God could man find what he was looking for (happiness). Incontrovertibly, Augustine who lived his early life to gratify the desires of the flesh with his paramour must have remembered that his early desire for lasting and genuine happiness was unattainable because of his godless life. He realised that any attempt to seek happiness without Christ would lead to nothing but utter disappointment.

⁶ Joseph Omoregbe : *Ethics : A Systematic and Historical Study*, Global Educational Services P.O. Box 39, Plaistow High Street, (London E13 England, Global Educational Services, 1979), p. 110.

⁷ Joseph Omoregbe, *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸ Coles : *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, Coles Publishing Company Ltd., (1967) (London, Toronto, Coles Publishing Company, 1967), p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

Augustine expressed concern about evil in the world. The presence of evil, of course, had been the concern of many philosophers few of which were: Antony flew,¹⁰ Ninian Smart,¹¹ J. L. Mackie,¹² Plato¹³ and theologian like St. Augustine. The appalling depth and extent of human suffering due to the presence of evil can make the picture of a loving God, at times, implausible.

Mackie says :

If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one or several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.¹⁴

Machination, man's inhumanity to man, diabolical tendency, callous and atrocious activities of man under heaven were regarded as evil, dark or menacingly ugly in the world. Thus evil-physical or moral was often regarded as being diametrically opposed to God's will. But Augustine in order to facilitate a quick understanding of God who was in Christ combined platonic conception with theological portrait of God - the one as the absolute, the all-perfect God from whom emanates the *nous* (intelligene) and good things in the universe. He portrayed God as a good God against the general observation of many philosophers and he saw the universe as being a good universe. He, however, maintained that man committed evil because of the natural propensity to commit evil in him. This tendency was implanted into man as a result of original sin. The original sin vitiated man's will to concede the will of God. Only divine grace could assist man to eschew evil and cleave to good.

Augustine traced moral evil to man's misuse of his free will. Man, he felt,

¹⁰ Flew Anthony and Alasdair Macintyre (Eds) : *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Student Christian Movement Press Ltd., (London ; New York : Macmillan Company Ltd., 1955), p. 209.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹² Mackie, J. L. 'Evil' and 'Omnipotence' in John Hick: *Philosophy of Religion*, Second Edition (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 38.

¹³ *Onomachon*, *ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁴ Mackie, *Ibid.*

was prone to making evil or wrong choice when man could as well make a pleasant or good choice. According to him :

If you try to find the efficient cause of this choice, there is none to be found. For nothing causes an evil will, since it is the evil will itself which causes an evil act.¹⁵

Obviously, Augustine had, probably, viewed free choice from the fact that everybody was conscious of good things especially what everybody ought to do at all times. He did not consider an illusion of free choice experimentally induced by posthypnotic suggestion. According to Cronnor, D.J.O. in a situation of hyponosis where a person may unhesitatingly affirm that he chose freely, uninfluenced by any feeling of constraint to perform the act in question. But observer would know that the instruction to act in this way was programmed into the person's unconscious by hypnosis. This Cronnor's argument is of course vulnerable since observers, according to him knew that such an act was not freely made. It naturally follows that such an act was not a free choice. Nevertheless, Cronnor believes that there are many cases of compulsive acts of a criminal or anti-social kind that are performed without any consciousness of constraint. He says :

Kleptomania is a common instance. It is often the psychiatrist and gives evidence for a compulsion that is not the less real because it operates below the threshold of awareness.¹⁶

Undoubtedly, in Nigeria and in other parts of the globe, anybody who is suffering from schizophrenia, delirium or any mentally related ailments, are not often held responsible for their acts. Such acts are not free even though people who are ignorant of the law would normally assume that they are responsible for their acts. All said and done, Augustine's submission still holds water in the sense that man was and is still free to exercise his free will.

Augustine, being a moral rigorist, vouchsafed righteousness by individual. He did nothing to stand in the way of either individuals or groups treading the way of righteousness and did not allow personal relationship or individual aspirations to thwart the doing of God's will in people's lives. He abhorred sinful pleasure. This development might not be unconnected with a life of debauchery and anarchy which he had earlier lived which he believed was a repugnant,

¹⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XII Chap. 6 in Omoregbe *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
¹⁶ Cronnor, D. J. O. *Free Will*. (London, The Macmillan Press, 1971), pp. 76 - 77.

distasteful, unpalatable and unbeneficial life. Augustine strongly maintained that there were 'two cities'. The city of God and the city of man. Everybody, he believed, was a member of either the city of God or the city of man. Those who observed moral laws and served God were members of the 'city of God' while those who violated moral laws and were impious were members of the city of man. To obtain God's salvation, man must belong to the city of God. The city of God would finally triumph over all forces of darkness. Although Augustine's thought was influenced by the collapse of the Roman secular power which occurred in 410 when Rome was sacked by the visigoth king Alaric and then North Africa was invaded by vandals in 430, the political empire of Rome was in complete ruin. By the time the political empire had collapsed the church automatically gained positions of influence throughout the provinces over which Rome had ruled, as H.A.L. Fisher puts it, 'the chaos of the empire was the opportunity of the church'.¹⁷ Augustine's conception of the church therefore was in a sense an idealised version of the Roman empire. The city of God, embattled against the forces of evil and barbarism but destined ultimately (unlike the Roman empire which collapsed because of internal corruption) to triumph over its enemies. The ruler of the church was of course, God.

1.2 Theological Contributions :

Augustine sermonised against Donatism at Carthage, Hippo and in villages; he wrote against it and set forth his doctrine as his own theological contributions. Donatists, we should remember, were a group of individuals who did not accept the validity of the ordination of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage on the ground that Felix of Aptunga who surrendered holy things - Bible etc. to Christians' persecutor, actively participated in the ordination. These people were orthodox in their teaching. They firmly held that any sacrament administered by any unworthy ministers remained invalid. The minister's unworthiness had invalidated whatever sacrament was administered. This group therefore did not recognize Catholic church on the ground of embracing invalidity. This may explain the fact why at the instance of Augustine, the council of Carthage persuaded Emperor Honorius in 411 to convoke a public confrontation of Catholic and Donatist

bishops. On June 1, 3 and 8, -66 Catholic and 279 Donatist bishops held discussion in the presence of the imperial commissioner Marcellinus. Augustine and Aurelius of Carthage served as the Catholic spokesmen. A new edict of repression was directed against the donatists. St. Augustine was fighting hard to support the general belief that Catholic church was the only recognized church and any faction that broke away had already deviated from the truth basing such belief on the premise that Roman Catholic church was the church founded by the Apostles. Barry Till in his writing describes donatists as :

poor, fierce and untamed group, who resented the less harsh and puritanical attitudes of their more sophisticated urban christian neighbours. They took no more kindly to Roman rule than they did to Roman civilisation.¹⁸

Till, possibly had from his fact recorded this if he was not, of course, biased by absolute fidelity to the Catholic church during his writing. Augustine, it should be noted, later stated that : 'baptism was not invalidated by the wrong view of the minister while the power of sacrament did not lie in the worthiness or otherwise of the person who administered it but in the character of the church.'¹⁹ He strongly believed that the Catholic church, the church to which he belonged was regarded as a holy church and Apostolic in character and, as such, all sacraments there were holy.

In his first anti-Pelagian work *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* in 411-412, Augustine showed his antagonistic stance to the position held by Pelagius who taught that man had power to live a sinless life; that the possibility of living a crystal clean life was created with man. Without any strength and power from God, man could live a sinless life. He taught that God had aided man by providing the law and, indeed, Christ as a perfect example for men to follow. In his own theological contribution, Augustine discountenanced the Pelagium position by highlighting the original state of man. Man, according to him was humble, even base creature; the subject who deserved only the penalty for his wickedness. But God, being the all sufficient potentate, provided grace to enable man establish a cordial relationship with him. This grace which the monarch extended to his subject helped them to establish a rapport with God.

¹⁸ Barry Till : *The Churches Search for Unity* (Great Britain, Chaucer, Press, 1972), p. 82.

¹⁹ CC-0. Adarnidam Digital Preservation Foundation, Gandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant
Barry Till, *Ibid.*, p. 97, also see Harry H. Eder, *St. Augustine*

The sinfulness of man was identified very closely in Augustine's thought with man's physical nature and in particular with his sensuous and sexual nature. The grace of God, otherwise known as the unmerited favour was granted by God to give man some latitude from any desire for sin.

It is worthy of note, however, that it was the terror of Augustine's extremely authoritarian theology that actually provoked a seemingly unending reaction from a British Monk Pelagius. Although Pelagius put on a stubborn resistance about this doctrine but Augustine's position was later vindicated. The church, through the synod in Carthage in 416 accepted Augustine's teaching and outrightly condemned Pelagianism. In another council held in 418, the position held by Pelagius was further condemned.

Besides, the saint identified quite a number of christological errors in Manichean's, Apollinarists' and Phetinian teachings. The Manicheas denied the humanity of Christ; the phetinians denied Christ's full divinity while the Apollinarists' denied full humanity of Christ.²⁰ He denounced Manichean's cosmology; their view of man and man's sin; their concept of God as having attributes and anatomical features and ascribing evil to deity. Albeit, Augustine had little conflict with Arianism, he often insisted in his sermons on the equality of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Against what Tertullian (in the West) and Origen (in the East) had taught, Augustine formulated his doctrine about Trinity. His third book was on Trinity. In the book, he developed the final form of Western teaching about Trinity.

In de Roy's methodology, he strongly maintains that Augustine's trinitarian theology was presented statistically or thematically. Although de Roy's apparent perspective is developmental, he believes that Augustine's operating principle consistently reduces the trinitarian theology to a triadology.²¹

To strengthen his beliefs, Augustine established a monastery for philosophical contemplation at the express permission of Valerius - the aging bishop. The monastery later became Augustine's seminary. He established himself as master homilectician.

²⁰ Mircea Eliade : *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. 1 Macmillan Publishing Company (London, New York, Collier Macmillan Publishing Ltd.,) pp. 520 - 526.

2 Pragmatic Lessons From Augustine's Submission

In Augustine's 'logocentricism', the logos constitutes the object of worship. In this teaching, concession is placed on the centre of attraction which is Christ, his doctrines and other escathological promises. It behoves that all adherents including Africans must accord Christ a place of pre-eminence in their lives instead of having each of their legs in Christianity and African traditional religion inspite of African cultural milieu. The church in Africa should be able to place importance on the spiritual essence of the church rather than on evanescent mundane things of the present world. Transitory things - pecuniary, power, position, wealth, influence etc. which are being presently apotheosised seem to be undurable, ephemeral and quite unworthy of sublimity accorded them at the expense of the spiritual growth of the church. Crave for mammon among the rank and file of the clergy and the laity has engendered the present lethargic state of the church where people come to the church primarily to seek material wealth or physical healing alone. Gbenga Alaketu in one of his observations says :

It seems some pastors now see the church as a business enterprise and have used it to enrich themselves.²²

It nevertheless appears as if people are now paying more attention to 'mammon' rather than God. Albeit during Augustine's period he believed in dualism in which there were always conflicting forces. His dualistic orientation helped him to dichotomise the whole global world into the 'city of God' and the 'city of man'. In the city of God, people were saved through the atoning works of Christ while in the outside material world people were wallowing in the mire of sins and affliction. The latter set of people were under the governance of the devil, who as a kind of Lord of misrule was presiding over the worldly gargantuan disorder, while the former lived in heaven of bliss under the rulership of God. In Africa of today, the world which Augustine had labelled as the 'city of man' has found her inroad into the church. Thus in Africa, where there is a mad desire for riches, perhaps, due to perpetual abject poverty, gross dehumanisation of man by a negligible rich minority and unspeakable man inhumanity to man by a few cabal at the helm of political and business affairs, the situation calls for sanity. The church as a sacred institution must keep her apart from mundane influence

while a life of moderation should be institutionalised.

Futhermore, Augustine realised that the goal of man was happiness. Undoubtedly, the happiness he was yearning for in the early part of his life eluded him due to his reckless amorous life. The joy he had earlier lost however came within his reach when he was at accord with God via salvation. In the same vein, people who are restless, insomniac or overwhelmed, with dreams of illusory grandeur should be turned to Christ where Augustine said they could get happiness. In pursuance of this, the church should intensify her proselytisation programme to convert the benighted souls. Besides this, the preachers should demonstrate their happiness by their enviable, exemplary, crystal clean or transparently honest and moderate lives instead of their present unbridled, extravagantly unreasonable and inconsistent lives which some preachers are known to indulge in.

Augustine's dualistic submission presupposes that in the midst of the innumerable antagonistic alternatives such as : light and darkness; holy and unholy or profane; hot and cold; right and left;²³ members of the church should be guided to choose the right things. The free-will of adherents should be channelled towards a right and profitable direction. Such things which call for prompt guidance include among others: choice of heaven and hell; holy and unholy things and choice of the rightful partners in marriage. The latter would minimise the alarming rate at which people are divorcing one another in courts of law when people look up on to Christians to live a life that is above board. Although some believe that where there is civilization such a thing cannot but occasionally rear up its ugly head.

In Africa, inordinately ambitious people often desire to establish their own churches. This is why there is proliferation of churches, sects or denominations. In this wise, people are bound to propagate conflicting doctrines. Presently, there are controversies surrounding quite a number of doctrines. Such doctrines

²³ Augustine : *The City of God Ibid.* Also lao-tsu (laocius) the founder of Taoism expressed a similar dualistic belief. He believed that there was growth and decline, increase and decrease, expansion and contraction, beginnings and endings, ups and downs, hot and cold, light and darkness, North and South, East and West, right and left, forward and backward, opening and closing, advancing and retreating, creating and destroying, giving and receiving, leading and following, odd and even, good and bad, love and hatred, fear and confidence, stimulus and response, youth and age, affirmation and denial etc. For this teaching, see Archie J. Bahm: *The World's Religion*, Dell Publication Co. New York, (1964) pp. 154-155. Besides, Zarathustra or Zoroaster who lived between (618-541 BC) expressed the same belief. See Tremor ling *Ibid.*

include: payment of tithes and offering, Christian participation in politics, usage of herbal or orthodox medicine, Christians choosing medical and paramedical or legal fields as careers or professions and a host of other issues. Like Augustine who fervently preached against Arianism and other undesirable doctrines, Christians in Africa should stoutly resist whatever are regarded as misleading doctrines.

Concluding Remark

Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, who transformed Plato into a near Christian combining the logos doctrine with platonic idealism, the gospel of John with the writings of Plotinus, reconciling Greek wisdom with Hebrew Christian faith, did not only establish himself as a fine Christian, but also as a theologian of note. Augustine's deep involvement in writing reveals him as a philosopher who was incorporating a new biblically oriented theology into his understanding of Christian faith. Augustine from another perspective can be seen as an exponent of Roman Catholic philosophical and theological ideas. Thus his influence in the West can be compared to Origen's influence in the East. His influence can be seen at two different levels: first, his influence was and is accessible to the simple inquiry of the historian; the influence of his thought and formulation of his doctrines had direct influence on his successors - latin fathers who came after him etc. such as Leo I and Gregory I as well, of course, as on the whole of middle Ages. The tremendous influence of his sermons on listeners and preachers of his own age such as quodvaltdeus, Fulgentius of Ruspe and Caesarius of Arles, established him as a powerful preacher. Indeed, Augustine rose from darkness to light, from a sinner to a saint, from grass to grace, from obscurity to fame and from a miserable recluse to stardom. □

Glimpses

Sadhu Ittyavirah

In Every Rise and Fall

The rising tide begins to fall when it has reached its maximum height. Trees reaching up to the sky, in course of time fall down and become one with the dust of the earth.

Today's millionaire may be a pauper tomorrow.

It does not take aeons for a healthy man to die and to be consigned to the grave.

On account of all these rise and fall, ebb and flow, life and death... we see around, we do not have to be perturbed. With the author of 'The Imitation of Christ' we do not have to exclaim "Vanity of vanities."

More than to the transitory nature of the pleasures of this world, and to the limitations of our existence here on earth, these witness to God's eternal sharing and self-emptying. They point to Christ's taking the form of a slave, leaving aside the glories of his divinity.

God's self-emptying is to be seen in the lovely blossoms which fade and fall to the ground, in the flows, in the wake of the ebbs, in life yielding to death.

He who is on the top comes down and lifts up him who is at the bottom. And this man in his turn comes down and lifts up another who is down. The work goes on and on.

Christ's redemptive love is mirrored in the rise and fall, joys and sorrows, growth and decline... we see around.

At heart, deep down, we, indeed the whole creation partake of the eternal sharing and self-emptying of God.

Man alone can knowingly participate in this great sharing. It is through man others can rise to an awareness of this great sharing. Let us participate joyfully in this.



Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte

His Holiness John Paul II

TO THE BISHOPS CLERGY AND LAY FAITHFUL AT THE CLOSE OF THE GREAT JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000

*To my Brother Bishops, To Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious
and all the Lay Faithful.*

1. At the beginning of the new millennium, and at the close of the Great Jubilee during which we celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostle to "put out into the deep" for a catch: "*Duc in altum*" (Lk 5:4). Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish" (Lk 5:6).

Duc in altum! These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

The Church's joy was great this year, as she devoted herself to contemplating the face of her Bridegroom and Lord. She became more than ever a pilgrim people, led by him who is the "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20). With extraordinary energy, involving so many of her members, the People of God here in Rome, as well as in Jerusalem and in all the individual local churches, went through the "Holy Door" that is Christ. To him who is the

goal, of history and the one Saviour of the world, the Church and the Spirit cried out: "*Marana tha* - Come, Lord Jesus" (cf. Rev 22:17, 20; 1 Cor 16:22).

It is impossible to take the measure of this event of grace which in the course of the year has touched people's hearts. But certainly, "a river of living water", the water that continually flows "from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (cf. Rev 22:1), has been poured out on the Church. This is the water of the Spirit which quenches thirst and brings new life (cf. Jn 4:14). This is the merciful love of the Father which has once again been made known and given to us in Christ. At the end of this year we can repeat with renewed jubilation the ancient words of thanksgiving: 'Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever' (Ps 118:1).

2. For all this, I feel the need to write to you, dearly beloved, to share this song of praise with you. From the beginning of my Pontificate, my thoughts had been on this Holy Year 2000 as an important appointment. I thought of its celebration as a providential opportunity during which the Church, thirty five years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm.

Has the Jubilee succeeded in this aim? Our commitment, with its generous efforts and inevitable failings, is under God's scrutiny. But we cannot fail to give thanks for the "marvels" the Lord has worked for us: "*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*" (Ps 89:2).

At the same time, what we have observed demands to be reconsidered, and in a sense "deciphered", in order to hear what the Spirit has been saying to the Church (cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, etc.) during this most intense year.

3. Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us. Often during these months we have looked towards the new millennium which is beginning, as we lived this Jubilee not only as a *remembrance of the past*, but also as a *prophecy of the future*. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action. This is a task I wish to invite all the local churches to undertake. In each of them, gathered around their Bishop, as they listen to the word and "break bread" in brotherhood (cf. Acts 2:42), the 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative'.¹ It is above all in the

actual situation of each local church that the mystery of the one People of God takes the particular form that fits it to each individual context and culture.

In the final analysis, this rooting of the Church in time and space mirrors *the movement of the Incarnation itself*. Now is the time for each local Church to assess its fervour and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities, by reflecting on what the Spirit has been saying to the People of God in this special year of grace, and indeed in the longer span of time from the Second Vatican Council to the Great Jubilee. It is with this purpose in mind that I wish to offer in this Letter, at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year, the contribution of my Petrine ministry, so that the Church may shine ever more brightly in the variety of her gifts and in her unity as she journeys on.

I. Meeting Christ The Legacy of the Great Jubilee

4. "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty" (Rev 11:17). In the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee I expressed the hope that the bimillennial celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation would be lived as "one unceasing hymn of praise to the Trinity"² and also "as a journey of reconciliation and a sign of true hope for all who look to Christ and to his Church".³ And this Jubilee Year has been an experience of these essential aspects, reaching moments of intensity which have made us as it were touch with our hands the merciful presence of God, from whom comes "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17).

My thoughts turn first to the *duty of praise*. This is the point of departure for every genuine response of faith to the revelation of God in Christ. Christianity is grace, it is the wonder of a God who is not satisfied with creating the world and man, but puts himself on the same level as the creature he has made and, after speaking on various occasions and in different ways through his prophets, "in these last days ... has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2).

In these days! Yes, the Jubilee has made us realize that two thousand years of history have passed without diminishing the freshness of that "today", when the angels proclaimed to the shepherds the marvellous event of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem: "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11). Two thousand years have gone by, but Jesus'

² Bull *Incarnationis Misterium*, 3: AAS 91 (1999), 132.

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³ *Ibid.*, 4: loc. cit., 133.

proclamation of his mission, when he applied the prophecy of Isaiah to himself before his astonished fellow townspeople in the Synagogue of Nazareth, is as enduring as ever: "Today this scripture had been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). Two thousand years have gone by, but sinners in need of mercy - and who is not? - still experience the consolation of that "today" of salvation which on the Cross opened the gates of the Kingdom of God to the repentant thief: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43).

The Fulness of Time

5. The coincidence of this Jubilee with the opening of a new millennium has certainly helped people to become more aware of the mystery of Christ within the great horizon of the history of salvation, without any concession to millenarian fantasies. *Christianity is a religion rooted in history!* It was in the soil of history that God chose to establish a covenant with Israel and so prepare the birth of the Son from the womb of Mary "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4). Understood in his divine and human mystery, Christ is the foundation and centre of history, he is its meaning and ultimate goal. It is in fact through him, the Word and image of the Father, that "all things were made" (Jn 1:3; cf. Col 1:15). His incarnation, culminating in the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Spirit, is the pulsating heart of time, the mysterious hour in which the Kingdom of God came to us (cf. Mk 1:15), indeed took root in our history, as the seed destined to become a great tree (cf. Mk 4:30-32).

"Glory to you, Jesus Christ, for you reign today and for ever". With this song repeated thousands of times we have contemplated Christ this year as he is presented in the Book of Revelation: "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13). And contemplating Christ, we have also adored the Father and the Spirit, the one and undivided Trinity, the ineffable mystery in which everything has its origin and its fulfilment.

The Purification of Memory

6. To purify our vision for the contemplation of the mystery, this Jubilee Year has been strongly marked by the request for forgiveness. This is true not only for

individuals, who have examined their own lives in order to ask for mercy and gain the special gift of the indulgence, but for the entire Church, which has decided to recall the infidelities of so many of her children in the course of history, infidelities which have cast a shadow over her countenance as the Bride of Christ.

For a long time we had been preparing ourselves for this examination of conscience, aware that the Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, "is at once holy and always in need of being purified".⁴ Study congresses helped us to identify those aspects in which, during the course of the first two millennia, the Gospel spirit did not always shine forth. How could we forget *the moving Liturgy of 12 March 2000* in Saint Peter's Basilica, at which, looking upon our Crucified Lord, I asked forgiveness in the name of the Church for the sins of all her children? This "purification of memory" has strengthened our steps for the journey towards the future and has made us more humble and vigilant in our acceptance of the Gospel.

Witnesses to the Faith

7. This lively sense of repentance, however, has not prevented us from giving glory to the Lord for what he has done in every century, and in particular during the century which we have just left behind, by granting his Church *a great host of saints and martyrs*. For some of them the Jubilee year has been the year of their beatification or canonization. Holiness, whether ascribed to Popes well-known to history or to humble lay and religious figures, from one continent to another of the globe, has emerged more clearly as the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the Church. Holiness, a message that convinces without the need for words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ.

On the occasion of the Holy Year much has also been done to gather together *the precious memories of the witnesses to the faith in the twentieth century*. Together with the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, we commemorated them on 7 May 2000 in the evocative setting of the Colosseum, the symbol of the ancient persecutions. This is a heritage which must not be lost; we should always be thankful for it and we should renew our resolve to imitate it.

A Pilgrim Church

8. As if following in the footsteps of the Saints, countless sons and daughters of the Church have come in successive waves to Rome, to the Tombs of the Apostles, wanting to profess their faith, confess their sins and receive the mercy that saves. I have been impressed this year by the crowds of people which have filled Saint Peter's Square at the many celebrations. I have often stopped to look at the long queues of pilgrims waiting patiently to go through the Holy Door. In each of them I tried to imagine the story of a life, made up of joys, worries, sufferings; the story of someone whom Christ had met and who, in dialogue with him was setting out again on a journey of hope.

As I observed the continuous flow of pilgrims, I saw them as a kind of *concrete image of the pilgrim Church*, the Church placed, as Saint Augustine says, "amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God".⁵ We have only been able to observe the outer face of this unique event. Who can measure the marvels of grace wrought in human hearts? It is better to be silent and to adore, trusting humbly in the mysterious workings of God and singing his love without end: "*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo!*".

Young People

9. The many Jubilee gatherings have brought together the most diverse groups of people, and the level of participation has been truly impressive - at times sorely trying the commitment of organizers and helpers, both ecclesiastical and civil. In this Letter I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone. But apart from the numbers, what has moved me so often was to note the intensity of prayer, reflection and spirit of communion which these meetings have generally showed.

And how could we fail to recall especially *the joyful and inspiring gathering of young people*? If there is an image of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 that more than any other will live on in memory, it is surely the streams of young people with whom I was able to engage in a sort of very special dialogue, filled with

⁵ *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2: PL 41, 614; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

mutual affection and deep understanding. It was like this from the moment I welcomed them in the Square of Saint John Lateran and Saint Peter's Square. Then I saw them swarming through the city, happy as young people should be, but also thoughtful, eager to pray, seeking "meaning" and true friendship. Neither for them nor for those who saw them will it be easy to forget that week, during which Rome became "young with the young." It will not be possible to forget the Mass at Tor Vergata.

Yet again, the young have shown themselves to be for Rome and for the Church *a special gift of the Spirit of God*. Sometimes when we look at the young, with the problems and weaknesses that characterize them in contemporary society, we tend to be pessimistic. The Jubilee of Young People however changed that, telling us that young people, whatever their possible ambiguities, have a profound longing for those genuine values which find their fullness in Christ. Is not Christ the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart? Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship? If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross. For this reason, in response to their enthusiasm, I did not hesitate to ask them to make a radical choice of faith and life and present them with a stupendous task: to become "morning watchmen" (cf. Is 21:11-12) at the dawn of the new millennium.

The Variety of the Pilgrims

10. Obviously I cannot go into detail about each individual Jubilee event. Each one of them had its own character and has left its message, not only for those who took part directly but also for those who heard about them or took part from afar through the media. But how can we forget the mood of celebration of the *first great gathering dedicated to children*? In a way, to begin with them meant respecting Christ's command: "Let the children come to me" (Mk 10:14). Perhaps even more it meant doing what he did when he placed a child in the midst of the disciples and made it the very symbol of the attitude which we should have if we wish to enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 18:2-4).

Thus, in a sense, it was in the footsteps of children that all the different groups of adults came seeking the Jubilee gift: from old people to the sick

and handicapped, from workers in factories and fields to sportspeople, from artists to university teachers, from Bishops and priests to people in consecrated life, from politicians to journalists, to the military personnel who came to confirm the meaning of their service as a service to peace.

One of the most notable events was *the gathering of workers* on 1 May, the day traditionally dedicated to the world of work. I asked them to live a spirituality of work in imitation of Saint Joseph and of Jesus himself. That Jubilee gathering also gave me the opportunity to voice a strong call to correct the economic and social imbalances present in the world of work and to make decisive efforts to ensure that the processes of economic globalization give due attention to solidarity and the respect owed to every human person.

Children, with their irrepressible sense of celebration, were again present for the *Jubilee of Families*, when I held them up to the world as the "springtime of the family and of society". This was a truly significant gathering in which numberless families from different parts of the world came to draw fresh enthusiasm from the light that Christ sheds on God's original plan in their regard (cf. Mk 10:6-8; Mt 19:4-6) and to commit themselves to bringing that light to bear on a culture which, in an ever more disturbing way, is in danger of losing sight of the very meaning of marriage and the family as an institution.

For me one of the more moving meetings was the one with *the prisoners at Regina Caeli*. In their eyes I saw suffering, but also repentance and hope. For them in a special way the Jubilee was a "year of mercy".

Finally, in the last days of the year, an enjoyable occasion was the meeting with *the world of entertainment*, which exercises such a powerful influence on people. I was able to remind all involved of their great responsibility to use entertainment to offer a positive message, one that is morally healthy and able to communicate confidence and love.

The International Eucharistic Congress

11. In the spirit of this Jubilee Year the *International Eucharistic Congress* was intended to have special significance. And it did! Since the Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ made present among us, how could his *real presence* not be at the centre of the Holy Year dedicated to the Incarnation of the Word? The

year was intended, precisely for this reason, to be "intensely Eucharistic"⁶ and that is how we tried to live it. At the same time, along with the memory of the birth of the Son, how could the memory of the Mother be missing? Mary was present in the Jubilee celebration not only as a theme of high-level academic gatherings, but above all in the great Act of Entrustment with which, in the presence of a large part of the world episcopate, I entrusted to her maternal care the lives of the men and women of the new millennium.

The Ecumenical Dimension

12. You will understand that I speak more readily of the Jubilee as seen from the See of Peter. However I am not forgetting that I myself wanted the Jubilee to be celebrated also in the particular churches, and it is there that the majority of the faithful were able to gain its special graces, and particularly the indulgence connected with the Jubilee Year. Nevertheless it is significant that many dioceses wanted to be present, with large groups of the faithful, here in Rome too. The Eternal City has thus once again shown its providential role as the place where the resources and gifts of each individual church, and indeed of each individual nation and culture, find their "catholic" harmony, so that the one Church of Christ can show ever more clearly her mystery as the "sacrament of unity".⁷

I had also asked for special attention to be given in the programme of the Jubilee Year to the *ecumenical aspect*. What occasion could be more suitable for encouraging progress on the path towards full communion than the shared celebration of the birth of Christ? Much work was done with this in mind, and one of the highlights was the ecumenical meeting in Saint Paul's Basilica on 18 January 2000, when for the first time in history a *Holy Door* was opened jointly by the Successor of Peter, the Anglican Primate and a Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the presence of representatives of Churches and Ecclesial Communities from all over the world. There were also other important meetings with Orthodox Patriarchs and the heads of other Christian denominations. I recall in particular the recent visit of His Holiness

⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 55: AAS 127 (1995) 238.

⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. In addition, very many members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities took part in the Jubilee meetings organized for various groups. The ecumenical journey is certainly still difficult, and will perhaps be long, but we are encouraged by the hope that comes from being led by the presence of the Risen One and the inexhaustible power of his Spirit, always capable of new surprises.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

13. And how can I not recall my *personal Jubilee along the pathways of the Holy Land*? I would have liked to begin that journey at Ur of the Chaldeans, in order to follow, tangibly as it were, in the footsteps of Abraham "our father in faith" (cf. Rom 4:11-16). However, I had to be content, with a pilgrimage in spirit, on the occasion of the evocative Liturgy of the Word celebrated in the Paul VI Audience Hall on 23 February. The actual pilgrimage came almost immediately afterwards, following the stages of salvation history. Thus I had the joy of visiting Mount Sinai, where the gift of the Ten commandments of the Covenant was given. I set out again a month later, when I reached Mount Nebo, and then went on to the very places where the Redeemer lived and which he made holy. It is difficult to express the emotion I felt in being able to venerate the places of his birth and life, Bethlehem and Nazareth, to celebrate the Eucharist in the Upper Room, in the very place of its institution, to meditate again on the mystery of the Cross at Golgotha, where he gave his life for us. In those places, still so troubled and again recently afflicted by violence, I received an extraordinary welcome not only from the members of the Church but also from the Israeli and Palestinian communities. Intense emotion surrounded my prayer at the Western Wall and my visit to the Mausoleum of Yad Vashem, with its chilling reminder of the victims of the Nazi death camps. My pilgrimage was a moment of brotherhood and peace, and I like to remember it as one of the most beautiful gifts of the whole Jubilee event. Thinking back to the mood of those days, I cannot but express my deeply felt desire for a prompt and just solution to the still unresolved problems of the Holy Places, cherished by Jews, Christians and Muslims together.

International Debt

14. The Jubilee was also a great event of charity and it could not be otherwise. Already in the years of preparation, I had called for greater and more incisive attention to the problems of poverty which still beset the world. The problem of the *international debt of poor countries* took on particular significance in this context. A gesture of generosity towards these countries was in the very spirit of the Jubilee, which in its original Biblical setting was precisely a time when the community committed itself to re-establishing justice and solidarity in interpersonal relations, including the return of whatever belonged to others. I am happy to note that recently the Parliaments of many creditor States have voted a substantial remission of the bilateral debt of the poorest and most indebted countries. I hope that the respective Governments will soon implement these parliamentary decisions. The question of multilateral debt contracted by poorer countries with international financial organizations has shown itself to be a rather more problematic issue. It is to be hoped that the member States of these organizations, especially those that have greater decisional powers, will succeed in reaching the necessary consensus in order to arrive at a rapid solution to this question on which the progress of many countries depends, with grave consequences for the economy and the living conditions of so many people.

New Energies

15. These are only some of the elements of the Jubilee celebration. It has left us with many memories. But if we ask what is the core of the great legacy it leaves us, I would not hesitate to describe it as the *contemplation of the face of Christ*: Christ considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey.

Now we must look ahead, we must "put out into the deep", trusting in Christ's words: *Duc in altum!* What we have done this year cannot justify a sense of complacency, and still less should it lead us to relax our commitment. On the contrary, the experiences we have had should *inspire in us new energy*, and

impel us to convert in concrete initiatives the enthusiasm which we have felt. Jesus himself warns us: "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks

back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). In the cause of the Kingdom there is no time for looking back, even less for settling into laziness. Much awaits us, and for this reason we must set about drawing up an effective post-Jubilee pastoral plan.

It is important however that what we propose, with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer. Ours is a time of continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of "doing for the sake of doing". We must resist this temptation by trying "to be" before trying "to do". In this regard we should recall how Jesus reproved Martha: "You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful" (Lk 10:41-42). In this spirit, before setting out a number of practical guidelines for your consideration, I wish to share with you some points of meditation on the mystery of Christ, the absolute foundation of all our pastoral activity.

II. A Face to Contemplate

16. "We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). This request, addressed to the Apostle Philip by some Greeks who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, echoes spiritually in our ears too during this Jubilee Year. Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day - often perhaps unconsciously - ask believers not only to "speak" of Christ, but in a certain sense to "show" him to them. And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?

Our witness, however, would be? hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first *contemplated his face*. The Great Jubilee has certainly helped us to do this more deeply. At the end of the Jubilee, as we go back to our ordinary routine, storing in our hearts the treasures of this very special time, our gaze is more than ever firmly *set on the face of the Lord*.

The Witness of the Gospels

17. The contemplation of Christ's face cannot fail to be inspired by all that we are told about him in Sacred Scripture, which from beginning to end is permeated

by his mystery, prefigured in a veiled way in the Old Testament and revealed fully in the New, so that Saint Jerome can vigorously affirm: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ".⁸ Remaining firmly anchored in Scripture, we open ourselves to the action of the Spirit (cf. Jn 15:26) from whom the sacred texts derive their origin, as well as to the *witness of the Apostles* (cf. Jn 15:27), who had a first-hand experience of Christ, the Word of life: they saw him with their eyes, heard him with their ears, touched him with their hands (cf. 1 Jn 1:1).

What we receive from them is a vision of faith based on precise historical testimony: a true testimony which the Gospels, despite their complex redaction and primarily catechetical purpose, pass on to us in an entirely trustworthy way.⁹

18. The Gospels do not claim to be a complete biography of Jesus in accordance with the canons of modern historical science. From them, nevertheless, *the face of the Nazarene emerges with a solid historical foundation*. The Evangelists took pains to represent him on the basis of trustworthy testimonies which they gathered (cf. Lk 1:3) and working with documents which were subjected to careful ecclesial scrutiny. It was on the basis of such first-hand testimony that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit's action, they learnt the humanly perplexing fact of Jesus' virginal birth from Mary, wife of Joseph. From those who had known him during the almost thirty years spent in Nazareth (cf. Lk 3:23) they collected facts about the life of "the carpenter's son" (Mt 13:55) who was himself a "carpenter" and whose place within the context of his larger family was well established (cf. Mk 6:3). They recorded his religious fervour, which prompted him to make annual pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem with his family (cf. Lk 2:41), and made him a regular visitor to the synagogue of his own town (cf. Lk 4:16).

Without being complete and detailed, the reports of his public ministry become much fuller, starting at the moment of the young Galilean's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan. Strengthened by the witness from on high and aware of being the "beloved son" (Lk 3:22), he begins his preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God, and explains its demands and its power by words and signs of grace and mercy. The Gospels present him to us as one who travels through towns and villages, accompanied by twelve Apostles whom he has

⁸ "Ignoratio enim Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est": *Commentarii in Isaiam*, Prologue: PL 24, 17.

chosen (cf. Mk 3:13-19), by a group of women who assist them (cf. Lk 8:2-3); by crowds that seek him out and follow him, by the sick who cry out for his healing power, by people who listen to him with varying degrees of acceptance of his words.

The Gospel narrative then converges on the growing tension which develops between Jesus and the dominant groups in the religious society of his time, until the final crisis with its dramatic climax on Golgotha. This is the hour of darkness, which is followed by a new, radiant and definitive dawn. The Gospel accounts conclude, in fact, by showing the Nazarene victorious over death. They point to the empty tomb and follow him in the cycle of apparitions in which the disciples - at first perplexed and bewildered, then filled with unspeakable joy - experience his living and glorious presence. From him they receive the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22) and the command to proclaim the Gospel to "all nations" (Mt 28:19).

The life of faith

19. "The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (Jn 20:20). The face which the Apostles contemplated after the Resurrection was the same face of the Jesus with whom they had lived for almost three years, and who now convinced them of the astonishing truth of his new life by showing them "his hands and his side" (*ibid.*). Of course it was not easy to believe. The disciples on their way to Emmaus believed only after a long spiritual journey (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The Apostle Thomas believed only after verifying for himself the marvellous event (cf. Jn 20:24-29). In fact, regardless of how much his body was seen or touched, *only faith could fully enter the mystery of that face*. This was an experience which the disciples must have already had during the historical life of Christ, in the questions which came to their minds whenever they felt challenged by his actions and his words. One can never really reach Jesus except by the path of faith, on a journey of which the stages seem to be indicated to us by the Gospel itself in the well known scene at Caesarea Philippi (cf. Mt. 16:13-20). Engaging in a kind of first evaluation of his mission, Jesus asks his disciples what "people" think of him, and they answer him: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Mt 16:14).

A lofty response to be sure, but still a long way - by far - from the truth. The CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

crowds are able to sense a definitely exceptional religious dimension to this rabbi who speaks in such a spellbinding way, but they are not able to put him above those men of God who had distinguished the history of Israel. Jesus is really far different! It is precisely this further step of awareness, concerning as it does the deeper level of his being, which he expects from those who are close to him: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). Only the faith proclaimed by Peter, and with him by the Church in every age, truly goes to the heart, and touches the depth of the mystery: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16).

20. How had Peter come to this faith? And what is asked of us, if we wish to follow in his footsteps with ever greater conviction? Matthew gives us an enlightening insight in the words with which Jesus accepts Peter's confession: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (16:17). The expression "flesh and blood" is a reference to man and the common way of understanding things. In the case of Jesus, this common way is not enough. A grace of "revelation" is needed, which comes from the Father (cf. *ibid.*). Luke gives us an indication which points in the same direction when he notes that this dialogue with the disciples took place when Jesus "was praying alone" (Lk 9:18). Both indications converge to make it clear that we cannot come to the fullness of contemplation of the Lord's face by our own efforts alone, but by allowing grace to take us by the hand. Only *the experience of silence and prayer* offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery which finds its culminating expression in the solemn proclamation by the Evangelist Saint John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14).

The Depth of the Mystery

21. The Word and the flesh, the divine glory and his dwelling among us! It is *in the intimate and inseparable union of these two aspects* that Christ's identity is to be found, in accordance with the classic formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451): "one person in two natures". The person is that, and that alone, of the Eternal Word, the Son of the Father. The two natures, without any confusion

whatsoever, but also without any possible separation, are the divine and the human.¹⁰

We know that our concepts and our words are limited. The formula, though always human, is nonetheless carefully measured in its doctrinal content, and it enables us, albeit with trepidation, to gaze in some way into the depths of the mystery. Yes, Jesus is true God and true man! Like the Apostle Thomas, the Church is constantly invited by Christ to touch his wounds, to recognize, that is, the fullness of his humanity taken from Mary, given up to death, transfigured by the Resurrection: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side" (Jn 20:27). Like Thomas, the Church bows down in adoration before the Risen One, clothed in the fullness of his divine splendour, and never ceases to exclaim: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

22. "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). This striking formulation by John of the mystery of Christ is confirmed by the entire New Testament. The Apostle Paul takes this same approach when he affirms that the Son of God was born "of the race of David, according to the flesh" (cf. Rom 1:3; cf. 9:5). If today, because of the rationalism found in so much of contemporary culture, it is above all faith in the divinity of Christ that has become problematic, in other historical and cultural contexts there was a tendency to diminish and do away with the historical concreteness of Jesus' humanity. But for the Church's faith it is essential and indispensable to affirm that the Word truly "became flesh" and took on *every aspect of humanity*, except sin (cf. Heb 4:15). From this perspective, the incarnation is truly a *kenosis* - a "selfemptying" - on the part of the Son of God of that glory which is his from all eternity (Phil 2:6-8; cf. 1 Pt 3:18).

On the other hand, this abasement of the Son of God is not an end in itself, it tends rather towards the full glorification of Christ, even in his humanity: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9- 11).

¹⁰ "Following the holy Fathers, unanimously, we teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, true God and true man ... one and the same Christ the Lord, the only-begotten, to be recognized in two natures, without confusion, immutable, indivisible, inseparable ... he is not divided or separated in two persons, but he is one and the same Son, the only-begotten, God, Word and Lord, Jesus Christ."

23. "Your face, O Lord, I seek" (Ps 27:8). The ancient longing of the Psalmist could receive no fulfilment greater and more surprising than the contemplation of the face of Christ. God has truly blessed us in him and has made "his face to shine upon us" (Ps 67:1). At the same time, God and man that he is, he reveals to us also the true face of man, "fully revealing man to man himself".¹¹

Jesus is "the new man" (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) who calls redeemed humanity to share in his divine life. The mystery of the Incarnation lays the foundations for an anthropology which, reaching beyond its own limitations and contradictions, moves towards God himself, indeed towards the goal of "divinization". This occurs through the grafting of the redeemed on to Christ and their admission into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. The Fathers have laid great stress on this soteriological dimension of the mystery of the Incarnation: it is only because the Son of God truly became man that man, in him and through him, can truly become a child of God.¹²

The Son's Face

24. This divine-human identity emerges forcefully from the Gospels, which offer us a range of elements that make it possible for us to enter that "frontier zone" of the mystery, represented by *Christ's self-awareness*. The Church has no doubt that the Evangelists in their accounts, and inspired from on high, have correctly understood in the words which Jesus spoke the truth about his person and his awareness of it. Is this not what Luke wishes to tell us when he recounts Jesus' first recorded words, spoken in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was barely twelve years old? Already at that time he shows that he is aware of a unique relationship with God, a relationship which properly belongs to a "son". When his mother tells him how anxiously she and Joseph had been searching for him, Jesus replies without hesitation: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's affairs?" (Lk 2:49). It is no wonder therefore that later as a grown man his language authoritatively expresses the depth of his own mystery, as is abundantly clear both in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mt

¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹² Saint Athanasius observes in this regard: "Man could not become divine remaining united to a creature, if the creature were not true God". *Oratio II contra Arianos*, 70: PC 26,425 B-426G.

11:27; Lk 10:22) and above all in the Gospel of John. In his self-awareness, Jesus has no doubts: "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38).

However valid it may be to maintain that, because of the human condition which made him grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52), his human awareness of his own mystery would also have progressed to its fullest expression in his glorified humanity, there is no doubt that already in his historical existence Jesus was aware of his identity as the Son of God. John emphasizes this to the point of affirming that it was ultimately because of this awareness that Jesus was rejected and condemned: they sought to kill him "because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (Jn 5:18). In Gethsemane and on Golgotha Jesus' human awareness will be put to the supreme test. But not even the drama of his Passion and Death will be able to shake his serene certainty of being the Son of the heavenly Father.

A Face of Sorrow

25. In contemplating Christ's face, we confront *the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery*, as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross. The mystery within the mystery, before which we cannot but prostrate ourselves in adoration.

The intensity of the episode of the agony in the Garden of Olives passes before our eyes. Oppressed by foreknowledge of the trials that await him, and alone before the Father, Jesus cries out to him in his habitual and affectionate expression of trust: "Abba, Father". He asks him to take away, if possible, the cup of suffering (cf. Mk 14:36). But the Father seems not to want to heed the Son's cry. In order to bring man back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the "face" of sin. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

We shall never exhaust the depths of this mystery. All the harshness of the paradox can be heard in Jesus' seemingly desperate cry of pain on the Cross: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34). Is it possible to imagine a greater agony, a more impenetrable darkness? In reality, the anguished "why" addressed to the Father

unspeakable pain; but it is also illumined by the meaning of that entire prayer, in which the Psalmist brings together suffering and trust, in a moving blend of emotions. In fact the Psalm continues: "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you set them free ... Do not leave me alone in my distress, come close, there is none else to help" (Ps 22:5,12).

26. Jesus' cry on the Cross, dear Brothers and Sisters, is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, "abandoned" by the Father, he "abandons" himself into the hands of the Father. His eyes remain fixed on the Father. Precisely because of the knowledge and experience of the Father which he alone has, even at this moment of darkness he sees clearly the gravity of sin and suffers because of it. He alone, who sees the Father and rejoices fully in him, can understand completely what it means to resist the Father's love by sin. More than an experience of physical pain, his Passion is an agonizing suffering of the soul. Theological tradition has not failed to ask how Jesus could possibly experience at one and the same time his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment. The simultaneous presence of these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects is rooted in the fathomless depths of the hypostatic union.

27. Faced with this mystery, we are greatly helped not only by theological investigation but also by that great heritage which is the "*lived theology*" of the saints. The saints offer us precious insights which enable us to understand more easily the intuition of faith, thanks to the special enlightenment which some of them have received from the Holy Spirit, or even through their personal experience of those terrible states of trial which the mystical tradition describes as the "dark night". Not infrequently the saints have undergone *something akin to Jesus' experience on the Cross* in the paradoxical blending of bliss and pain. In the *Dialogue of Divine Providence*, God the Father shows *Catherine of Siena* how joy and suffering can be present together in holy souls: "Thus the soul is blissful and afflicted: afflicted on account of the sins of its neighbour, blissful on account of the union and the affection of charity which it has inwardly received. These souls imitate the spotless Lamb, my Only-begotten Son, who on the Cross was both blissful and afflicted".¹³ In the same way, *Therese of Lisieux* lived her

agony in communion with the agony of Jesus, "experiencing" in herself the very paradox of Jesus's own bliss and anguish: "In the Garden of Olives our Lord was blessed with all the joys of the Trinity, yet his dying was no less harsh. It is a mystery, but I assure you that, on the basis of what I myself am feeling, I can understand something of it".¹⁴ What an illuminating testimony! Moreover, the accounts given by the Evangelists themselves provide a basis for this intuition on the part of the Church of Christ's consciousness when they record that, even in the depths of his pain, he died imploring forgiveness for his executioners (cf. Lk 23:34) and expressing to the Father his ultimate filial abandonment: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

The Face of the One Who is Risen

28. As on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the Church pauses in contemplation of this bleeding face, which conceals the life of God and offers salvation to the world. But her contemplation of Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. *He is the Risen One!* Were this not so, our preaching would be in vain and our faith empty (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). The Resurrection was the Father's response to Christ's obedience, as we learn from the Letter to the Hebrews: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (5:7-9).

It is the Risen Christ to whom the Church now looks. And she does so in the footsteps of Peter, who wept for his denial and started out again by confessing, with understandable trepidation, his love of Christ: "You know that I love you" (Jn 21:15-17). She does so in the company of Paul, who encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus and was overwhelmed: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Two thousand years after these events, the Church relives them as if they had happened today. Gazing on the face of Christ, the Bride contemplates her treasure and her joy. "*Dulcis Iesus memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia*": how

¹⁴ *Last Conversations, Yellow Booklet* (6 July 1997). *Studies in Religion* (Paris, 1996), p. 1025.

sweet is the memory of Jesus, the source of the hearts true joy! Heartened by this experience, the Church today sets out once more on her journey, in order to proclaim Christ to the world at the dawn of the Third Millennium: he "is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

III. Starting Afresh from Christ

29. "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). This assurance, dear brothers and sisters, has accompanied the Church for two thousand years, and has now been renewed in our hearts by the celebration of the Jubilee. From it we must gain *new impetus in Christian living*, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith. Conscious of the Risen Lord's presence among us, we ask ourselves today the same question put to Peter in Jerusalem immediately after his Pentecost speech: "What must we do?" (Acts 2:37).

We put the question with trusting optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium.

But it must be translated into *pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community*. The Jubilee has given us the extraordinary opportunity to travel together for a number of years on a journey common to the whole Church, a catechetical journey on the theme of the Trinity, accompanied by precise pastoral undertakings designed to ensure that the Jubilee would be a fruitful event. I am grateful for the sincere and widespread acceptance of what I proposed in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. But now it is no

longer an immediate goal that we face, but the larger and more demanding challenge of normal pastoral activity. With its universal and indispensable provisions, the programme of the Gospel must continue to take root, as it has always done, in the life of the Church everywhere. It is *in the local churches* that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified - goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources - which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

I therefore earnestly exhort the Pastors of the particular Churches, with the help of all sectors of God's People, confidently to plan the stages of the journey ahead, harmonizing the choices of each diocesan community with those of neighbouring Churches and of the universal Church.

This harmonization will certainly be facilitated by the collegial work which Bishops now regularly undertake in Episcopal Conferences and Synods. Was this not the point of the continental Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops which prepared for the Jubilee, and which forged important directives for the present-day proclamation of the Gospel in so many different settings and cultures? This rich legacy of reflection must not be allowed to disappear, but must be implemented in practical ways.

What awaits us therefore is an exciting work of pastoral revitalization - a work involving all of us. As guidance and encouragement to everyone, I wish to indicate *certain pastoral priorities* which the experience of the Great Jubilee has, in my view, brought to light.

Holiness

30. First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*. Was this not the ultimate meaning of the Jubilee indulgence, as a special grace offered by Christ so that the life of every baptized person could be purified and deeply renewed?

It is my hope that, among those who have taken part in the Jubilee, many will have benefited from this grace, in full awareness of its demands. Once the Jubilee is over, we resume our normal path, but knowing that stressing holiness

It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the "universal call to holiness." The Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church. The rediscovery of the Church as "mystery", or as a people "gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"¹⁵ was bound to bring with it a rediscovery of the Church's "holiness", understood in the basic sense of belonging to him who is in essence the Holy One, the "thrice Holy" (cf. Is 6:3). To profess the Church as holy means to point to her as *the Bride of Christ*, for whom he gave himself precisely in order to make her holy (cf. Eph 5:25-26). This as it were objective gift of holiness is offered to all the baptized.

But the gift in turn becomes a task, which must shape the whole of Christian life: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Th 4:3). It is a duty which concerns not only certain Christians: "All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity".¹⁶

31. At first glance, it might seem almost impractical to recall this elementary truth as the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium. Can holiness ever be "planned"? What might the word "holiness" mean in the context of a pastoral plan?

In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few "uncommon heroes" of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and

¹⁵ Saint Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica*, 23: PL 4, 553; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine "*training in holiness*", adapted to people's needs. This training must integrate the resources offered to everyone with both the traditional forms of individual and group assistance, as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognized by the Church.

Prayer

32. This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in *the art of prayer*. The jubilee Year has been a year of more intense prayer, both personal and communal. But we well know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life. Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life,¹⁷ but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life.

33. Is it not one of the "signs of the times" that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is a *widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a *renewed need for prayer*? Other religions, which are now widely present in ancient Christian lands, offer their own responses to this need, and sometimes they do so in appealing ways. But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the

¹⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 20.
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Father and the Saviour of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead.

The great mystical tradition of the Church of both East and West has much to say in this regard. It shows how prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit's touch, resting filially within the Father's heart. This is the lived experience of Christ's promise: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21). It is a journey totally sustained by grace, which nonetheless demands an intense spiritual commitment and is no stranger to painful purifications (the "dark night"). But it leads, in various possible ways, to the ineffable joy experienced by the mystics as "nuptial union". How can we forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila?

"Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become *genuine "schools" of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love". Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.¹⁸

34. Christians who have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life are of course called to prayer in a particular way: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation, and it is important that they should cultivate it with special care. But it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in farfetched superstitions.

It is therefore essential that *education in prayer* should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning. I myself have decided to dedicate the

forthcoming Wednesday catecheses to *reflection upon the Psalms*, beginning with the Psalms of Morning Prayer with which the public prayer of the Church invites us to consecrate and direct our day. How helpful it would be if not only in religious communities but also in parishes more were done to ensure an all-pervading climate of prayer. With proper discernment, this would require that popular piety be given its proper place, and that people be educated especially in liturgical prayer. Perhaps it is more thinkable than we usually presume for the average day of a Christian community to combine the many forms of pastoral life and witness in the world with the celebration of the Eucharist and even the recitation of Lauds and Vespers. The experience of many committed Christian groups, also those made up largely of lay people, is proof of this.

The Sunday Eucharist

35. It is therefore obvious that our principal attention must be given to the liturgy, "the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength".¹⁹ In the twentieth century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly *the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday* itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter.²⁰ For two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that "first day of the week" (Mk 16:2,9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1), when the Risen Christ gave the Apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23). The truth of Christ's Resurrection is the original fact upon which Christian faith is based (cf. 1 Cor 15:14), an event set *at the centre of the mystery of time*, prefiguring the last day when Christ will return in glory. We do not know what the new millennium has in store for us, but we are certain that it is safe in the hands of Christ, the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16); and precisely by celebrating his Passover not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church will continue to show to every

¹⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

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²⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998), 19: AAS 90 (1998), 724.

generation "the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads".²¹

36. Following *Dies Domini*, I therefore wish to insist that *sharing in the Eucharist* should really be *the heart of Sunday* for every baptized person. It is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life. We are entering a millennium which already shows signs of being marked by a profound interweaving of cultures and religions, even in countries which have been Christian for many centuries. In many regions Christians are, or are becoming, a "little flock" (Lk 12:32). This presents them with the challenge, often in isolated and difficult situations, to bear stronger witness to the distinguishing elements of their own identity. The duty to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday is one of these. The Sunday Eucharist which every week gathers Christians together as God's family round the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, is also the most natural antidote to dispersion. It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, *the Lord's Day* also becomes *the Day of the Church*,²² when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

37. I am also asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you will recall, in 1984 I dealt with this subject in the Post- Synodal Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, which synthesized the results of an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to this question. My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of "the sense of sin" apparent in today's culture²³ But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is "the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2: loc. cit., 714.

²² *Cf. ibid.* 2: loc. cit., 734.

²³ *Cf. No. 18: AAS 77 (1985), 224.*

remission of serious sins committed after Baptism".²⁴ When the Synod addressed the problem, the crisis of the Sacrament was there for all to see, especially in some parts of the world. The causes of the crisis have not disappeared in the brief span of time since then. But the Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it. Dear brothers in the priesthood, we must not give in to passing crises! The Lord's gifts - and the Sacraments are among the most precious - come from the One who well knows the human heart and is the Lord of history.

The Primacy of Grace

38. If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: *the primacy of grace*. There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that "without Christ we can do nothing" (cf. Jn 15:5).

It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. When this principle is not respected, is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration? We then share the experience of the disciples in the Gospel story of the miraculous catch of fish: "We have toiled all night and caught nothing" (Lk 5:5). This is the moment of faith, of prayer, of conversation with God, in order to open our hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through us in all its power: *Duc in altum!* On that occasion, it was Peter who spoke the word

of faith: "At your word I will let down the nets" (*ibid.*). As this millennium begins, allow the Successor of Peter to invite the whole Church to make this act of faith, which expresses itself in a renewed commitment to prayer.

Listening to the Word

39. There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed *listening to the word of God*. Ever since the Second Vatican Council underlined the pre-eminent role of the word of God in the life of the Church, great progress has certainly been made in devout listening to Sacred Scripture and attentive study of it. Scripture has its rightful place of honour in the public prayer of the Church. Individuals and communities now make extensive use of the Bible, and among lay people there are many who devote themselves to Scripture with the valuable help of theological and biblical studies. But it is above all the work of evangelization and catechesis which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the word of God. Dear brothers and sisters, this development needs to be consolidated and deepened, also by making sure that every family has a Bible. It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.

Proclaiming the Word

40. To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be "servants of the word" in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium. Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a "Christian society" which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of "globalization" and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the

beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of "specialists" but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as *the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*. This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted, in such a way that the particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.

In the Third Millennium, Christianity will have to respond ever more effectively to this *need for inculturation*. Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root. In this Jubilee Year, we have rejoiced in a special way in the beauty of the Church's varied face. This is perhaps only a beginning, a barely sketched image of the future which the Spirit of God is preparing for us.

Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). In making these recommendations, I am thinking especially of *the pastoral care of young people*. Precisely in regard to young people, as I said earlier, the Jubilee has given us an encouraging testimony of their generous availability. We must learn to interpret that heartening response, by investing that enthusiasm like a new talent (cf. Mt 25:15) which the Lord has put into our hands so that we can make it yield a rich return.

41. May the shining example of the many witnesses to the faith whom we have remembered during the Jubilee sustain and guide us in this confident, enterprising and great presence of mission. For the Church, the martyrs have

always been a seed of life. *Sanguis martyrum semen christianorum*.²⁵ this famous "law" formulated by Tertullian has proved true in all the trials of history. Will this not also be the case of the century and millennium now beginning? Perhaps we were too used to thinking of the martyrs in rather distant terms, as though they were a category of the past, associated especially with the first centuries of the Christian era. The Jubilee remembrance has presented us with a surprising vista, showing us that our own time is particularly prolific in witnesses, who in different ways were able to live the Gospel in the midst of hostility and persecution, often to the point of the supreme test of shedding their blood. In them the word of God, sown in good soil, yielded a hundred fold (cf. Mt 13:8,23). By their example they have shown us, and made smooth for us, so to speak, the path to the future. All that remains for us is, with God's grace, to follow in their footsteps.

IV. Witness to Love

42. "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). If we have truly contemplated the face of Christ, dear Brothers and Sisters, our pastoral planning will necessarily be inspired by the "new commandment" which he gave us: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

This is the other important area in which there has to be commitment and planning on the part of the universal Church and the particular Churches: *the domain of communion (koinonia)*, which embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom 5:5), to make us all "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as "sacrament", as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race".²⁶

The Lord's words on this point are too precise for us to diminish their import. Many things are necessary for the Church's journey through history, not least in this new century; but without charity (agape) all will be in vain. It is again the

²⁵ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 50, 13: PL 1, 534.

²⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

Apostle Paul who in the hymn *to love* reminds us: even if we speak the tongues of men and of angels, and if we have faith "to move mountains", but are without love, all will come to "nothing" (cf. 1 Cor 13:2). Love is truly the "heart" of the Church, as was well understood by Saint Therese of Lisieux, whom I proclaimed a Doctor of the Church precisely because she is an expert in the *scientia amoris*: "I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was aflame with Love. I understood that Love alone stirred the members of the Church to act ... I understood that Love encompassed all vocations, that Love was everything".²⁷

A Spirituality of Communion

43. To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.

But what does this mean in practice? Here too our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to *promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism,

distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.

44. Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion. How can we forget in the first place those *specific services to communion* which are the *Petrine ministry* and, closely related to it, *episcopal collegiality*? These are realities which have their foundation and substance in Christ's own plan for the Church,²⁸ but which need to be examined constantly in order to ensure that they follow their genuinely evangelical inspiration.

Much has also been done since the Second Vatican Council for the reform of the Roman Curia, the organization of Synods and the functioning of Episcopal Conferences. But there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realize all the potential of these instruments of communion, which are especially appropriate today in view of the need to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times.

45. Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as the *Council of priests* and the *Pastoral Council*, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative;²⁹ yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality, of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful on the one hand uniting them *a priori* in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.

²⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter III.

²⁹ Cf. Congregation for the clergy et al., Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (15 August 1997), AAS 89 (1997), 652-677, especially Article 5: "The Structures of Collaboration in the Particular Church".

To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God. Significant is Saint Benedict's reminder to the Abbot of a monastery, inviting him to consult even the youngest members of the community: "By the Lord's inspiration, it is often a younger person who knows what is best".³⁰ And Saint Paulinus of Nola urges: "Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes".³¹ While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjustified claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.

The Diversity of Vocations

46. Such a vision of communion is closely linked to the Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.

Certainly, a generous commitment is needed - above all through insistent prayer to the Lord of the harvest (cf Mt 9:38) - *in promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life*. This is a question of great relevance for the life of the Church in every part of the world. In some traditionally Christian countries, the situation has become dramatic, due to changed social circumstances and a religious disinterest resulting from the consumer and secularist mentality. There

³⁰ *Regula*, III, 3: "Ideo autem omnes ad consilium vocari diximus, quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est".

³¹ "De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidem Spiritus Dei spirat". *Epistola* CC-0, Agamemnon Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh. Funding by IIR MohE-2023 Grant 23, 36 to Suplicius Severus. CSEL 29, 193.

is a pressing need to implement an extensive *plan of vocational promotion*, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on life's essential values. These reach their fulfilment in the response which each person is invited to give to God's call, particularly when the call implies a total giving of self and of one's energies to the cause of the Kingdom.

It is in this perspective that we see the value of all other vocations, rooted as they are in the new life received in the Sacrament of Baptism. In a special way it will be necessary to discover ever more fully *the specific vocation of the laity*, called "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God",³² they "have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world... by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people".³³

Along these same lines, another important aspect of communion is *the promotion of forms of association*, whether of the more traditional kind or the newer ecclesial movements, which continue to give the Church a vitality that is God's gift and a true "springtime of the Spirit". Obviously, associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church and the particular Churches, and in obedience to the authoritative directives of the Pastors. But the Apostle's exacting and decisive warning applies to all: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything and hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:19-21).

47. At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to *the pastoral care of the family*, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis. In the Christian view of marriage, the relationship between a man and a woman - a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble - is part of God's original plan, obscured throughout history by our "hardness of heart", but which Christ came to restore to its pristine splendour, disclosing what had been God's will 'from the beginning' (Mt 19:8). Raised to the dignity of a Sacrament, marriage expresses the "great mystery" of Christ's nuptial love for his Church (cf. Eph 5:32).

On this point the Church cannot yield to cultural pressures, no matter how

³² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

³³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 2.

widespread and even militant they may be. Instead, it is necessary to ensure that through an ever more complete Gospel formation Christian families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person - of the spouses, and of the children who are more fragile. Families themselves must become increasingly conscious of the care due to children, and play an active role in the Church and in society in safeguarding their rights.

Ecumenical Commitment

48. And what should we say of the urgent task of fostering communion in the delicate area of *ecumenism*? Unhappily, as we cross the threshold of the new millennium, we take with us the sad heritage of the past. The jubilee has offered some truly moving and prophetic signs, but there is still a long way to go.

By fixing our gaze on Christ, the Great Jubilee has given us a more vivid sense of the Church as a mystery of unity. "I believe in the one Church": what we profess in the Creed has *its ultimate foundation in Christ, in whom the Church is undivided* (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-13). As his Body, in the unity which is the gift of the Spirit, she is indivisible. The reality of division among the Church's children appears at the level of history, as the result of human weakness in the way we accept the gift which flows endlessly from Christ the Head to his Mystical Body. The prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room - "as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (Jn 17:21) - is both *relation and invocation*. It reveals to us the unity of Christ with the Father as the wellspring of the Church's unity and as the gift which in him she will constantly receive until its mysterious fulfilment at the end of time. This unity is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church, despite the human limitations of her members, and it is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. As gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, these elements lead them continuously towards full unity.³⁴

Christ's prayer reminds us that this gift needs to be received and developed ever more profoundly. The invocation "*ut unum sint*" is, at one and the same time, a binding imperative, the strength that sustains us, and a salutary rebuke

for our slowness and closed- heartedness. It is on Jesus's prayer and not on our own strength that we base the hope that even within history we shall be able to reach full and visible communion with all Christians.

In the perspective of our renewed post-jubilee pilgrimage, I look with great hope to the *Eastern Churches*, and I pray for a full return to that exchange of gifts which enriched the Church of the first millennium. May the memory of the time when the Church breathed with "both lungs" spur Christians of East and West to walk together in unity of faith and with respect for legitimate diversity, accepting and sustaining each other as members of the one Body of Christ.

A similar commitment should lead to the fostering of ecumenical dialogue with our brothers and sisters belonging to the *Anglican Communion* and the *Ecclesial Communities born of the Reformation*. Theological discussion on essential points of faith and Christian morality, cooperation in works of charity, and above all the great ecumenism of holiness will not fail, with God's help, to bring results. In the meantime we confidently continue our pilgrimage, longing for the time when, together with each and every one of Christ's followers, we shall be able to join wholeheartedly in singing: "How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!" (Ps 133:1).

Stake Everything on Charity

49. Beginning with intra-ecclesial communion, charity of its nature opens out into a service that is universal; it inspires in us a *commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being*. This too is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church's whole activity and her pastoral planning. The century and the millennium now beginning will need to see, and hopefully with still greater clarity, to what length of dedication the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest. If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-37). This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine,

the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ.

Certainly we need to remember that no one can be excluded from our love, since "through his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person".³⁵ Yet, as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them. This option is a testimony to the nature of God's love, to his providence and mercy; and in some way history is still filled with the seeds of the Kingdom of God which Jesus himself sowed during his earthly life whenever he responded to those who came to him with their spiritual and material needs.

50. In our own time, there are so many needs which demand a compassionate response from Christians. Our world is entering the new millennium burdened by the contradictions of an economic, cultural and technological progress which offers immense possibilities to a fortunate few, while leaving millions of others not only on the margins of progress but in living conditions far below the minimum demanded by human dignity. How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads?

The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely, if in addition to its traditional forms we think of its newer patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination. In this context Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness. Now is the time for a new "creativity" in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by "getting close" to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.

We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this *approach* be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom? Without this form of evangelization through

³⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
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charity and without the witness of Christian poverty the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today's society of mass communications. The charity of *works* ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of *words*.

Today's Challenges

51. And how can we remain different to the prospect of an *ecological crisis* which is making vast areas of our planet uninhabitable and hostile to humanity? Or by the *problems of peace*, so often threatened by the spectre of catastrophic wars? Or by *contempt for the fundamental human rights* of so many people, especially children? Countless are the emergencies to which every Christian heart must be sensitive.

A special commitment is needed with regard to certain aspects of the Gospel's radical message which are often less well understood, even to the point of making the Church's presence unpopular, but which nevertheless must be a part of her mission of charity. I am speaking of the duty to be committed to *respect for the life of every human being*, from conception until natural death. Likewise, the service of humanity leads us to insist, in season and out of season, that those using *the latest advances of science*, especially in the field of biotechnology, must never disregard fundamental ethical requirements by invoking a questionable solidarity which eventually leads to discriminating between one life and another and ignoring the dignity which belongs to every human being.

For Christian witness to be effective, especially in these delicate and controversial areas, it is important that special efforts be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church's position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person. In this way charity will necessarily become service to culture, politics, the economy and the family, so that the fundamental principles upon which depend the destiny of human beings and the future of civilization will be everywhere respected.

52. Clearly, all this must be done in a specifically Christian way: *the laity*

without ever yielding to the temptation to turn Christian communities into mere social agencies. In particular, the Church's relationship with civil society should respect the latter's autonomy and areas of competence, in accordance with the teachings of the *Church's social doctrine*.

Well known are the efforts made by the Church's teaching authority, especially in the twentieth century, to interpret social realities in the light of the Gospel and to offer in a timely and systematic way its contribution to the social question, which has now assumed a global dimension.

The ethical and social aspect of the question is an essential element of Christian witness. we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the Incarnation and, in the last analysis, of Christianity's eschatological tension. While that tension makes us aware of the relative character of history, it in no way implies that we withdraw from "building" history. Here the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is more timely than ever: "The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them disinterested in the welfare of their fellow human beings: on the contrary it obliges them more fully to do these very things".³⁶

A Practical Sign

53. In order to give a sign of this commitment to charity and human promotion, rooted in the most basic demands of the Gospel, I have resolved that the Jubilee year, in addition to the great harvest of charity which it has already yielded - here I am thinking in particular of the help given to so many of our poorer brothers and sisters to enable them to take part in the Jubilee - should leave *an endowment* which would in some way be *the fruit and seal of the love sparked by the Jubilee*. Many pilgrims have made an offering and many leaders in the financial sector have joined in providing generous assistance which has helped to ensure a fitting celebration of the Jubilee. Once the expenses of this year have been covered, the money saved will be dedicated to charitable purposes. It is important that such a major religious event should be completely dissociated from any semblance of financial gain. Whatever money remains will be used to continue

the experience so often repeated since the very beginning of the Church, when the Jerusalem community offered non-Christians the moving sight of a spontaneous exchange of gifts, even to the point of holding all things in common, for the sake of the poor (cf. Acts 2:44-45).

The endowment to be established will be but a small stream flowing into the great river of Christian charity that courses through history. A small but significant stream: because of the Jubilee the world has looked to Rome, the Church "which presides in charity"³⁷ and has brought its gifts to Peter. Now the charity displayed at the centre of Catholicism will in some way flow back to the world through this sign, which is meant to be an enduring legacy and remembrance of the communion experienced during the Jubilee.

Dialogue and Mission

54. A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its "reflection". This is the *mysterium lunae*, which was so much a part of the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church, who employed this image to show the Church's dependence on Christ, the Sun whose light she reflects.³⁸ It was a way of expressing what Christ himself said when he called himself the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12) and asked his disciples to be "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14).

This is a daunting task if we consider our human weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation.

55. It is in this context also that we should consider the great challenge of *inter-religious dialogue* to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.³⁹ In the years of preparation for the Great Jubilee the Church has sought to build, not least through a series of highly symbolic meetings, a *relationship of openness and dialogue*

³⁷ Cf. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, Preface, ed. Funk, I, 252.

³⁸ Thus, for example, Saint Augustine: "*Luna intellegitur Ecclesia, quod suum lumen non habeat, sed ab Unigenito Dei Filio, qui multis locis in Sanctis Scripturis allegorice sol appellatus est: Enarrationes in Psalmos, 10, 3: CCL 38, 42.*"

not infrequently reveals signs of his presence which help Christ's followers to understand more deeply the message which they bear. Was it not with this humble and trust-filled openness that the Second Vatican Council sought to read "the signs of the times?"⁴¹ Even as she engages in an active and watchful discernment aimed at understanding the "genuine signs of the presence or the purpose of God",⁴² the Church acknowledges that she has not only given, but has also "received from the history and from the development of the human race".⁴³ This attitude of openness, combined with careful discernment, was adopted by the Council also in relation to other religions. It is our task to follow with great fidelity the Council's teaching and the path which it has traced.

In the Light of the Council

57. What a treasure there is, dear brothers and sisters, in the guidelines offered to us by the Second Vatican Council! For this reason I asked the Church, as a way of preparing for the Great Jubilee, to *examine herself on the reception given to the Council*.⁴⁴ Has this been done? The Congress held here in the Vatican was such a moment of reflection, and I hope that similar efforts have been made in various ways in all the particular Churches. With the passing of the years, *the Council documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance*. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition. Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as *the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century*: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.

Conclusion Duc In Altum!

58. Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The

⁴¹ Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Caudium et Spes*, 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁴ Cf. Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 36: AAS 87 (1995), 28.

Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work. Did we not celebrate the Jubilee Year in order to refresh our contact with this living source of our hope? Now, the Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The missionary mandate accompanies us into the Third Millennium and urges us to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians: we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope "which does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5).

At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world. Many are the paths on which each one of us and each of our Churches must travel, but there is no distance between those who are united in the same communion, the communion which is daily nourished at the table of the Eucharistic Bread and the Word of Life. Every Sunday, the Risen Christ asks us to meet him as it were once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of "the first day of the week" (Jn 20:19) he appeared to his disciples in order to "breathe" on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel.

On this journey we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom, a few months ago, in the presence of a great number of Bishops assembled in Rome from all parts of the world, I entrusted the Third Millennium. During this year I have often invoked her as the "Star of the New Evangelization". Now I point to Mary once again as the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps. Once more, echoing the words of Jesus himself and giving voice to the filial affection of the whole Church, I say to her: "Woman, behold your children"(cf. Jn 19:26).

59. Dear brothers and sisters! The symbol of the Holy Door now closes behind us, but only in order to leave more fully open the living door which is Christ. After the enthusiasm of the Jubilee, it is not to a dull everyday routine that we return. On the contrary, if ours has been a genuine pilgrimage, it will have as it were stretched our legs for the journey still ahead. We need to imitate the zeal of the Apostle Paul: "Straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal

for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). Together, we must all imitate the contemplation of Mary, who returned home to Nazareth from her pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem, treasuring in her heart the mystery of her Son (cf. Lk 2:51).

The Risen Jesus accompanies us on our way and enables us to recognize him, as the disciples of Emmaus did, 'in the breaking of the bread' (Lk 24:35). May he find us watchful, ready to recognize his face and run to our brothers and sisters with the good news: "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn 20:25).

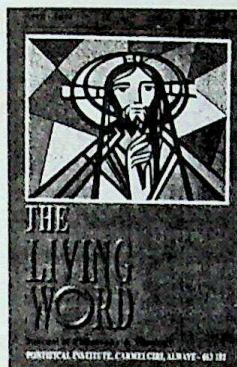
This will be the much desired fruit of the Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Jubilee which has vividly set before our eyes once more the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and the Redeemer of man.

As the Jubilee now comes to a close and points us to a future of hope, may the praise and thanksgiving of the whole Church rise to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

In pledge of this, I impart to all of you my heartfelt Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 6 January, the Solemnity of the Epiphany, in the year 2001, the twenty-third of my Pontificate.





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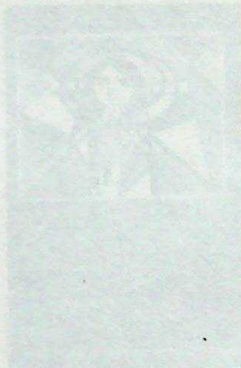
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